











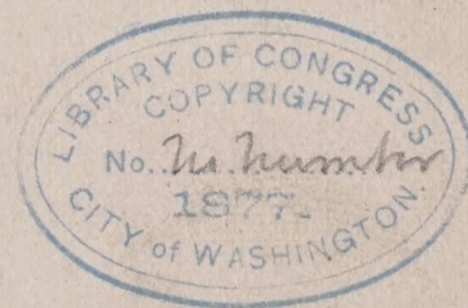


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# LOVE IN IDLENESS.

*A SUMMER STORY.*

*Wm.*  
By ELLEN W. (OLNEY) *Kirk*



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# LOVE IN IDLENESS.

## PART I.

### CHAPTER I.

MAURICE LAYTON'S wedding-day was fixed for the twenty-fifth of June, and had he been the most impassioned of lovers—which we cannot aver to have been the case—he could scarcely have looked forward to it with a more eager impatience or found the passage of the intervening weeks more tedious and slow. He had made up his mind to be utterly at leisure at the time of his marriage, and had despatched his business and concluded his arrangements for an idle summer as soon as Congress adjourned: the result was, that by the middle of May he had nothing in the world to do, and experienced the embarrassment a general might feel at the head of an invading army who has burned his boats behind him, yet finds it impossible to advance into the new country. Maurice was imperious in temper and resolute by habit, and in no lesser matter would have brooked such delay uncomplainingly; but he could hardly expect that Rosamond would hasten her wedding-day by a month because he found the interval wearisome. Besides, the mind of Miss Clifford was always fixed in serene conclusions, and Maurice was not apt to disturb the equanimity of their intercourse by any extravagant requests. He spent a week in the solitude of his home, and, in spite of his glowing prospects, grew every day more profoundly discouraged and out of humor with himself. He went back to Washington, and was so frequently congratulated on his happiness that he began to believe his depression to be the result of his ardor, which forbade his finding any enjoyment away from his bride. Elated at this idea, he rushed impetuously to The Oaklands and found Rosamond immersed in occupation. The house was filled with guests as usual, and shy longing bridesmaids stared Maurice out of countenance: he was appealed to as umpire in questions of taste and elegant detail; the wedding

was openly discussed before him, and he was treated like a disinterested referee or an unimportant participant. He had affirmed for years that he had no illusions, yet now he suffered disenchantment, and besides being supremely bored, he felt that he was losing his powers of mind in this crisis and speaking and acting like an idiot. He began to wonder what had induced him to think of being married at all, and told himself unaffectedly that if he had anticipated such penalties he would have accepted lifelong bachelorhood with rapture. Such reflections, however, were unprofitable, not to say morbid, for a man on the eve of marriage, and he felt it his duty to dismiss them. Just at this juncture he received a letter from his brother Frank, and without delay set off to pay him a day's visit, for even if the dear fellow were living at sixes and sevens in an unfurnished house, it was at least something in the way of activity to look him up and discover why on earth he was settling down in New England.

These two brothers regarded each other with an affection of peculiar tenderness, and if they did not see each other frequently, it was only because they had long since grown into the habit of living apart. They had been orphaned as mere lads, and a difference of seven years in their ages had separated them in education. Subsequent changes had thrown them still further asunder. Maurice's patrimony had been swept away in a financial crisis, and at eight and twenty he had set to work to make his own living, while Frank's property had accumulated through the agency of successful investments and a long minority into what became, shortly after he took it into his own hands, a great fortune.

The elder brother had been for twelve or thirteen years a lawyer of some celebrity, but of late he had quite merged his profession in politics, and was now fast winning a place among the most distin-

guished statesmen of his day. He was but forty-three, and his party were looking to him as their future leader, since he had already demonstrated masterful abilities — sagacity in counsel, a quick grasp and sure comprehension of details, above all, a fervid and commanding eloquence which seemed to spring from a complete self-surrender, but to exercise the control of an absolute will over its hearers.

The younger brother, on the other hand, had done nothing to distinguish himself, although he had had means, time and apparent opportunity to do a great deal. He had lived more in Europe than in the United States, and in a certain way was cosmopolitan enough to be indifferent to languages, climates or peoples so long as he found what he wanted in a country or city. What he wanted was so much a matter of interest to his numerous friends that considerable curiosity was wasted on the matter, and as much research as was compatible with a fine reserve on his part. He was known to be very fond of all the arts and a generous patron of artists whom he approved; he was acknowledged to be a good judge of pictures, and some of his marbles did him great credit; he was an indefatigable purchaser of bric-à-brac, and a connoisseur in all matters which related to the elegancies rather than the sublimities of life. Yet, although the things in which he was found most excellent had no moral grandeur about them, there was a sort of ideal perfection in his life which impressed those who knew him best. He was the simplest man alive both in habits and modes of thought, and ostentation was as unknown to him as a certain relish of individual luxury for which he had utterly missed the taste, and the lack of which left him regarding life from a serious, attentive stand-point, as if he were seeking to find out the reason of it. He would have been thought an unlikely man to be still at thirty-six an irresponsible bachelor; yet, however successful he had hitherto been as a society-man, his name had not even been associated with that of any marriageable woman as her possible suitor. Thus, when

he had suddenly announced the fact of his having purchased a small place in Saintford, a Connecticut village lying on Long Island Sound, his friends were not backward in suggesting reasons for his settling down.

Maurice's journey from The Oaklands to Saintford was uneventful enough, and it was three o'clock on a fine afternoon when he arrived and presented himself, after due inquiries, at the gate opening upon a pretty place where stood a gray stone cottage, its gables and bay-windows quite embowered by an unpruned luxuriance of roses and wisterias. Very fine old trees were scattered about the grounds singly and in groups, and beyond the terrace Maurice could see half a dozen men laying out a garden. Among them he discovered Frank, and at once strode across the spongy turf toward him; for his brother, spade in hand and wearing an air of hearty enterprise and domestic usefulness, was a phenomenon to stare at. Accordingly, Maurice stared, then burst out laughing. "Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "what an example of virtue!"

Frank flung down his spade. "I'll leave off at once," he said: "I never intend to set any examples. How are you, Maurice? I'm glad to see you. I feel like a beauty discovered at her toilet. I intended to have my place in perfect order before you came to spy out the land. But never mind: I really think I need not be ashamed of its nakedness. You can't guess how delightful it is to have my own vine and fig tree at last."

"On my word," exclaimed Maurice, "it's a remarkably pretty place, with the budding vines and the fine trees. It is a village for trees, I perceive. In fact, I have seen nothing else except green grass: there are evidently no people here."

He bent a keen look on his brother, who answered it with a smile, and at once began a description of the salient features of Saintford in general and his own modest estate in particular. When he had purchased it in February it was lying under eighteen inches of snow and ice, and he had experienced some of the

felicity of the survivors of the Deluge in watching the dry land appear. The house had been built ten years, but had never been occupied until now, for its original owner had died just as it was completed, leaving his affairs deeply involved, and the cottage was at once offered for sale, but at so high a figure that it remained in the market until Frank Layton cheerfully bid the thousands which brought it into his own possession. The subject once in hand, he grew eloquent about his plans, and led Maurice from one end of his enclosure to the other, descanting upon the turf, the shrubberies, the walks, the arbors and the trellises. He was evidently in a happy mood, and Maurice could not help suspecting there was some reason for it over and above his delight in his new possessions and his pleasure in receiving his well-beloved brother.

"*Satis beatus unciis Sabinus,*" quoted the elder as Frank paused. "You were always a good deal of an Horatian in your philosophy. I really think you are making the most of your grounds, but Saintford is too flat and tame to admit of anything like landscape gardening. Why did you not buy on the North River, or in some locality where Nature would have yielded you some splendid results?"

"Because," returned Frank, laughing, "I wanted to buy in Saintford, and as we don't have waterfalls and volcanoes, I have decided that I am indifferent to scenery."

"Oh, you have friends here?"

"Only some new acquaintances — no friends."

"Look here, Frank, are you going to be married?"

"Some time, I hope, but not at present. No, I assure you, Maurice," pursued Frank more gravely, "there is nothing of that sort going on. That I have a private reason for settling down here I admit to you, but to no one else. I will tell you about it after dinner. In the mean time, I have not asked you about Miss Clifford. I have had my innings in our talk, and now I shall give you a chance. Talk on, rhapsodize, indulge

in all the sweet follies of a lover, and I'll listen attentively and grudge you nothing."

Maurice looked grim. "I don't know," said he, "that I have anything in particular to say. Miss Clifford is well, we are to be married on the twenty-fifth of June, and I suppose that I am the happiest of men."

Their eyes met and they both laughed. They were standing at the foot of the grounds, with a fine bit of turf before them, and the three dogs who had followed them about were rolling over and over each other at their feet. There was a huge Newfoundland over whom a dainty King Charles was tyrannizing, and a languid greyhound who put his slender paw into the game whenever the fun appeared to be slackening. Maurice suddenly started them up eager and alert with a word, set them running round and round after each other in great circles, and finally flung himself on the grass and allowed them to scramble over him, licking his face and tumbling his hair.

"That reminds me of old times, Maurice," observed Frank. "But you at least are as young as ever."

"Oh, I play youth at times, and when I am at Oaklands with Clifford and Judge Herbert we do everything except standing on our heads. Those two old men would keep me boyish even if my youth were a spent torch. But at most times I feel the solemn responsibilities of my forty-three years. Who, to look at us both, would think there were but seven years between our ages? You seem about twenty-five."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, but you do."

Maurice was right enough when he declared that his face had little of that indefinable stamp of youth which still set its seal upon Frank. And there was reason enough for it, since he had always possessed too ardent and complex a temperament to remain long unworn by life. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, with a fine face, whose habitual expression in repose was abstracted and dreamy, and when he was aroused his large long gray

eyes were too piercing to allow their glance to be altogether pleasing. But under certain influences there shone from those eyes a sort of glow which kindled where it fell, and made his companion believe him one of the handsomest of men. Frank all his life had felt for his brother a love almost passing the love of woman. There were circumstances in their past which knit them more closely together than other kinsmen, and when he exclaimed that he was reminded of old times their memories both reverted to the early days, of which, although we cannot review them in detail, we may at least give the reader a hint.

The father of Maurice and Frank Layton had been a prominent statesman in the earlier part of the century, and during a mission to England had married there and brought his wife back to Washington. There was a great disparity in the ages of the two, but he was no ordinary man, and knew himself an object of the highest affection which sanctifies married life. His career was soon over, for Maurice was but ten when his father died. The widow took her two sons to a place they owned by the sea, and here she lived quietly with them until Maurice went to college. Just as he was about to graduate she died, and from being of all lads in the world the happiest, gayest, most blest, they were suddenly the most wretched. Maurice came home to kiss his mother's cold face, but hurried back to deliver his valedictory, because she had begged Frank with her latest breath to urge him to do it. Then he returned to the seaside house, and the two boys went on for a time in the familiar domestic routine which made them both suffer exquisite tortures. They morbidly retained every little household appurtenance as their mother had left it when she was stricken down. The piano was open, and her music-book turned to her favorite sonata. Her thimble and scissors lay on a bit of cambric on the work-table, and a vase beside them containing the withered flowers Frank had brought her on that last morning. These two unhappy boys felt like two children left out-

side the sunshiny place where their mates were playing.

It was Frank now who remembered that time the best. For Maurice it had for many years been a recollection to shrink from, a paralyzing Medusa face which struck him dead. But the younger brother could think of a night in that far-away time, twenty-four years ago, when, after listening anxiously for hours to hear Maurice come to bed, he had stolen down and found the young man stretched face downward on the lounge in the dim parlor, his face buried in the folds of a little white shawl that his mother had left there.

"Maurice," cried poor little shivering Frank, "mamma would not like you to behave like that. Perhaps she is here now, and grieving that you are not more brave."

The young man started up. "Oh, if she were here!" he cried, the veins in his forehead swelling into cords as he leaned forward gazing into vacancy, as if striving to see beyond vision—"if she were only here! If she could touch me once—put her head on my shoulder—kiss me! I dream of her so sometimes," he added, his voice breaking while he covered his face with his hands. "Last night what woke me up and sent me out of doors was that the moment I slept I seemed to feel the pressure of her cheek against mine."

Frank clung to his knees.

"I cannot help it: who could help it?" pursued Maurice with frightful vehemence. "I see her figure before me all the time, eternally beckoning—then, when I start forward, eternally vanishing. O God! why did she die? What else had I? She loved me—she thought of me always. Everything here reminds me of her. Look!" and springing up he staggered over to the work-table and laid a trembling hand on the little crumple of cambric which was growing yellow just there where his mother had thrown it down. "She was working my name on this handkerchief. When I saw the letters there, I tell you it went through me like a knife."

Frank was but thirteen years old at

this time, but he taught Maurice after a while that life goes on, and that the inexorable grave, which swallows up so much, does not yet hinder the survivors from making their little schemes of life and finding enjoyment. Maurice went abroad to complete his education at Oxford in compliance with his mother's wish, and afterward he traveled widely. He often remarked of those years that they were full of recollections he abhorred, because he had committed so many follies; but those who knew him best knew too that something within him let him have no rest, but tortured, urged, pushed him on into that state of mind which means excitement, experience at any cost. He was far enough from being happy, and found his motives and actions both mean and miserable. When, therefore, his property, which was still in the hands of the trustees of the estate, was lost at a time when the securest fortunes were swept away, the event was his salvation. He came home and went to work, with the results already mentioned. There were such strong contrasts in his character and in his history that his brother had always regarded him with wonder, and when he spoke or looked in the old way every chord of memory was swiftly touched, and all the old story of their boyhood and youth passed through his mind.

When the new proprietor had done the honors of his grounds the brothers went into the house to dinner. The conversation would have lagged if Frank had not been a delightful host, for Maurice seemed abstracted and gave but a divided attention. There was a completeness of detail about the house which attracted him, and he found himself admiring the silver and crystal, the carvings and quaint tiles of a Dutch sideboard, the painted panels of the walls and doors. But Frank needed no one's help. He had lived alone for two months, and had wit and suggestion enough to amuse a whole roomful. Maurice thought again within himself that his brother must have experienced some sort of joyful success to be in such good spirits.

On leaving the table they made a survey of the rooms, which were filled with

works of art and *objets de vertu*. Frank had traveled and resided in Europe so many years that his mere chance purchases when brought together were almost enough to furnish a house. The parlors were rococo in the extreme, and filled with bric-à-brac, and it was with a sensation of relief, when they entered the library and sat down before the wood-fire, that Maurice observed there was nothing frailer than bronze in the room, and that everything was so substantial he could throw himself about at pleasure.

"I never was a man to dance on eggs," said he. "I admire your faïence, but pottery and porcelain fill me with shiverings and shudderings. You have a bijou of a house. I could not help thinking, however, all through dinner, of the difference between us in spite of our strong family resemblance. In all my travels I don't remember that I ever picked up anything to show for them, except my poor old Venus."

"You see," returned Frank with a shrug, "I had nothing better to do. I never thought of making a collection, for as a rule I hate collections: they bore me. But I had money in my pocket, and when I came across a thing I liked I bought it and sent it over to Graham. But I confess I had no idea that I had gathered such an amount of trumpery until he sent it to me a month ago."

"I suppose you're quite a rich man?"

"Yes, I have more than I ever spend. I'm saving up for some worthy purpose or other, I suppose. It will be necessary for me to build a hospital when I find the right opportunity, just to save my self-respect. Meanwhile, Maurice, as I have told you a thousand times, half my income is yours."

"I know your generosity, my dear fellow, and love you for it, but in fact I have no need of it. To be sure, I have resigned my profession and have nothing but my salary, but my wife's fortune will be something prodigious. You see there are but two children now, and Clifford is almost a capitalist. In fact, Frank, I'm really making a most fortunate marriage. Clifford's position in the cabinet, his prestige, his enormous wealth, besides his

regard for me, all ensure my continued success."

"And success is dear to you?"

"Very dear," returned Maurice briefly, with an indescribable flash of his eye.

"But you seem to have given up private life and renounced private interests."

"I never hear the suggestion of private life without a distinct mental impression of a dull, disheveled woman, noisy children and vilely-cooked dinners."

"Does Miss Clifford share your ideas?"

"I presume so: she knows my views, at all events, and in fact has lived so constantly before the world that she has a scanty conception of what a quiet fire-side life is. By the way, Frank, how did you like her? You're always so hazy in the expression of your opinions that I rarely get a glimpse of your convictions. You saw her quite frequently late winter."

Frank was opening his cigar case: "She commands admiration, Maurice: I admire her. I think her very clever too, besides being a very stylish woman."

"I suspect," said Maurice thoughtfully, "that she is not attractive."

"She has certainly proved attractive to you; and, candidly, I think her calmness, her total want of coquetry, her nice discrimination in all social matters, just suit her for the position of your wife. Where would you be if, with all your occupations, you were obliged to dance attendance upon a little flirt who made eyes at every man she met, and with whom every male creature felt it his business to fall in love a little?"

"Do you suppose I would marry a woman of that kind—like Violet Meredith, for instance? No: I have not lacked common sense in my choice. Yes, you have hit my case to a nicety. Rosamond is fine-looking, but not too beautiful; refined, without being too sensitive; intelligent, but very quiet and reserved, as the wife of a public man requires to be. Then, too, she likes me and believes in me, yet is not sufficiently in love to hamper me with small feminine tyrannies."

Frank burst out laughing. "On my word!" he exclaimed, "you take your position coolly. I only wonder that with

such reasonable views you ever gained sufficient impetus to carry you to her feet."

"I am forty-three years old," returned Maurice with a humorous glance, "and Rosamond is at least thirty, and we don't do those picturesque things—like going on one's knees, for instance. Besides, I don't believe many men go into engagements with their eyes open. They drift with the tide, and suddenly find themselves stranded above high-water mark. Certainly, I never dreamed of offering myself to Miss Clifford until Judge Herbert asked me one night if I were not thinking of marrying her. Ten minutes after I was sitting beside her at dinner, and his question haunted me. She was intelligent and sympathetic, and alluded to a speech I had just made on a bill before the Senate in a way that flattered me to the finger-tips. I went back to my rooms, and before I slept dashed off a hasty note to her offering her my hand; but when I woke up next morning my inspiration had passed, and I decided to burn the billet and not pursue the matter. Fate, however, had interfered in the shape of Perkins, who had found the letter, and sealed, addressed and despatched it, as soon as he went to my writing-table."

And Maurice laughed in a way that induced one to conclude that he had no quarrel with either Fate or Perkins.

"I don't believe Miss Clifford ever heard the true state of the case," put in Frank slyly.

"Most certainly not. The moment I knew that she was in possession of my note I was in a state of feverish suspense. Clifford gave a state dinner that night, and I sat beside her through the interminable courses, and did not get a look or word from her. You know what an impatient fellow I am, and I finally compelled her attention. 'Miss Clifford,' said I, fixing my eyes full upon her, 'I really am in need of one little word from you in relation to that little arrangement.' She did not flinch, but even smiled slightly. 'Papa has my answer,' she returned; and I knew that I was accepted. Will you believe it?—it was a full week later

before I had an opportunity to see her alone."

"Well, you have had no lack of opportunities to make love since in all these eighteen months," observed Frank thoughtfully; "but I suspect that you are not a believer in love or in the sweet fooleries of lovers."

Maurice jumped up and strode about. "Oh, I believe in love fast enough," said he in a sarcastic voice. "Most men are pliant enough to opportunity when it comes at the right season. Twenty years ago I was young, ardent and inquisitive: at that time— But I have never used the cant phrases current among men regarding women; for after all our expressions of contempt and indifference to ideal affection, each man ends by being the dupe of his own imagination, and believes that a happiness exists for him which is denied to others. I am more consistent: candidly, I do not adore women, and in marrying I am merely doing the best I can do for myself, besides obeying the instinct which perpetuates society by inducing a man to beget a son to take his place in the world. With you, perhaps—probably, indeed—love would be a religion. With me it would always be a temptation: I should go mad and kiss away kingdoms and provinces. And I prefer kingdoms and provinces to the kisses of a sweet silly creature who might spoil my life."

They were both silent for a time, until Maurice grew tired of striding about, and sitting down again stretched out his long limbs toward the blaze.

"But you," he said presently in a different voice and with a light laugh—"you have leisure for that sort of thing. I wonder you don't go in for it."

Luigi, Frank's Italian servant, brought in coffee, which the two men took in silence, then removing the cups he put the evening papers on the table within reach of Maurice's hand, which was immediately extended toward them.

"I'm sorry those papers are so attractive," said Frank, "for I was just about to tell you why I came to Saintford."

"The papers may wait. Rosamond says she always knows her real rival—

that she has quite given up trying to interest me if a newspaper is at hand—but there is no question about it now: I'm as curious as a woman to find out your secret. Who is she?"

"Oh, what a wise man! I dare say I shall bore you."

But Maurice had no dread of being bored, and settled himself in his chair in an attitude of attention, fixing his eyes on his brother, who stared into the fire.

"Do you remember," Frank began at once, "of my writing to you twelve months ago that I had joined an expedition to visit Japan? then of my suddenly renouncing all my plans? Well, the reason of it was that I saw a young girl who interested me so deeply that I was anxious to remain and follow up my slender clew—not to turn my back upon a chance of happiness such as I had begun to believe did not exist for me. I was anxious to marry years ago: I could never understand why I was not more inclined to fall in love. All at once the reason was not far to seek. Here at length I saw the glow of dawn—the beginning of my day, still enveloped in darkness and mystery, but marked by gleams which I accept as premonitions of a happy future. You see, Maurice, that I am a believer in love."

"Yes. For Heaven's sake, go on!"

"Well, one evening in Paris I attended a soirée where the principal feature of the entertainment was music. I was unable to gain a glimpse of one of the performers, who pleased me by rendering some of Chopin's most brilliant compositions; so I skirted the crowd about the piano, and finally found a place in a sort of alcove finished up as a boudoir, where by peering through lace curtains I could look into the salon. But the player was a long-haired Bohemian, at whom there was no pleasure in staring as he tossed his hair as a pony does his mane, and made himself more hideous than the music was sweet; and I was about to retreat when suddenly a delicate gloved hand rested like a feather on my sleeve, and looking down I saw that a young girl of remarkable beauty stood beside me. She had evidently

taken my arm by mistake and supposed me to be some familiar friend, for she did not once look up, but was intent on the musician until he ceased and began rubbing his hands and stretching his knuckles before he started upon a new fantasia. All this time the girl's flower-crowned head touched my shoulder, and she poured a delightful stream of nonsense into my ears, which only ceased at a sudden movement on the part of the crowd. In another moment I had lost her, and saw her presently in the salon on the arm of an elderly gentleman. I sought everywhere for my hostess to ask the name of the young lady and the privilege of an introduction. I learned her name, but she had already left the rooms. She was Mademoiselle de Clairmont, and the gentleman was her uncle, a savant of some reputation—Mr. Knight.

"I am not too easily pleased, but now my fancy was suddenly taken possession of without any profound cause. I found myself wandering about absent and melancholy. Three days after, in the Louvre, I came upon Miss Clairmont again. She was with the same old gentleman, but this time a fair-faced woman of middle age completed the party. Nothing happened, although my own mental impression was distinct and forcible enough. Without seeming to follow her, I easily managed to keep near her, and once when a little bunch of violets dropped from her belt I had the pleasure of picking them up. She accepted them with a slight blush and the regular *jeune-fille* air of French girls, and her uncle looked at me sharply with a frigid eye. But I kept them in sight, and was fortunate enough to point them out to a friend of mine among the police whose vanity it was to know the name and position of every well-to-do stranger in Paris. He informed me at once that they were Mr. and Mrs. Knight, country-people of my own, and that the young lady was Mademoiselle de Clairmont, the niece of Mrs. Knight, and by her father's family related to the De Clairmonts of Vaucluse. This explanation was a good deal to me. I at once decided that it was within my

power to meet this young girl, woo her, and win her if I could. Judge of my chagrin when, on following them to England, I found that they were settled at Richmond on account of Miss Clairmont's engagement to Ralph Wylde!"

"She was engaged to Cousin Ralph Wylde—to that consummate prig? Well, she did not marry him. I remember Aunt Agnes wrote me something about the affair. What did you do under those circumstances?"

"Called myself a fool for my pains," rejoined Frank, "and joined a party for salmon-fishing in Norway."

"You did not try to see her, captivate her, carry her off from Ralph?"

"No: the prowess of Lochinvar is not in my line. If she were engaged to Ralph, I had good reason to suppose she was in love with him. I don't know that I am more modest than other men, but I have had no cause to believe that my attractions would outbalance those of even Ralph, whom I never thought a good fellow. No, I did not strike one blow for myself, but ran away for my life. What was a wild dream might become a dangerous reality if I were to meet her and see her intimately. But, Maurice, the stars fought for me in their courses. Instead of marrying Ralph in October, she broke with him and returned to this country with Mr. and Mrs. Knight. I do not yet know the circumstances of the case: Aunt Agnes was somehow mixed up in it, and quarreled with both Laura and Ralph Wylde in consequence. Violet wrote me that 'Felise had sowed the wind and ridden off on the whirlwind.'"

"Who is Felise, Frank?"

"Oh, Miss Clairmont;" and Frank colored like a girl.

"And this Mademoiselle Felise de Clairmont is at present settled down in Saintford?"

"Your guess is correct. Mrs. Knight is a native of the place, and has a house here. I have called on Mr. Knight with letters of introduction, and am invited there to dinner to-morrow."

"Have you seen Miss Clairmont?"

"No, not yet."

"It is now twelve months since you fell in love with her?"

"Twelve months since I handed her the violets she had dropped in the Louvre."

"Well, you have lived on a sadly meagre entertainment so far. By the bye, is she remarkably pretty?"

"She is a blonde with dark eyes—no common beauty."

"I should judge not," returned Maurice dryly, "from her power over you. One does not become intoxicated on milk and water."

The two men were suddenly silent. Frank was a trifle ill at ease from having parted with a secret he had barely confessed to his own heart, Maurice felt for him a sympathy which he did not usually grant to confessions of a similar nature, but both looked listless and indifferent, and the one lit the cigar with which he had been toying for the last hour, and the other drew his chair closer to the reading-table and opened the evening papers. But Maurice's mind was not on the news, and he continually put back his head, closed his eyes and lost himself in reverie from which he would emerge impatiently with unbent lips and a heightened color. Finally, he jumped up, ran his hand through his hair and with his back to the fire faced his brother. "It would never do for me to live in Saintford," said he, laughing slightly: "the life is too stimulating to the imagination and the senses. I find myself building air-castles like a school-girl over her bread and butter. I was trying to imagine what it would be to come here and find Mrs. Francis Layton sitting in that low velvet chair beside you. But I'll be hanged, Frank, if—"

"I beg of you to go on," rejoined Frank, well pleased with such a cheerful view of his prospects.

"I believe," said Maurice, closing his eyes and speaking slowly in a sleepy voice, "that I thought of her as my wife all the time."

"Ah," remarked Frank superbly, "I hope the dream was pleasant."

"Passing sweet. Give me the papers and I will put it behind me—this too en-

chanting vision. Well, success to you, Frank! No wonder you are in such infernal good spirits. But all the same, I would rather go to the devil at any time than fall in love as you have done."

## CHAPTER II.

It was on another tranquil May afternoon that Miss Clairmont ran down the steps of a large old country-house and stood waiting on the curbstone with her aunt for the carriage and pony to come round. Mrs. Knight was a sweet majestic woman of forty or more, always gracious and statuesque, who never said anything in particular, yet was always considered one of the most brilliant of women. Her niece clung to her confidently, and talked to her incessantly in a low clear voice with a vague foreign accent, with frequent little trills of laughter, and in spite of the difference in their ages they seemed almost like sisters. Mrs. Knight was childless, and the daughter of her only sister had filled a large place in her somewhat lonely life during the past six years. Felise would have been warmly loved in any event, but as she was, to tell the truth, an irresistibly pleasing girl, she was idolized by both aunt and uncle.

The general features of the young girl's appearance were a tall slender figure of remarkable grace; a face the complex character of whose beauty perplexed those who studied her from its contrast of a warm sunny smile and dark eyes full of yearning and easily suggestive of melancholy; a manner which was always impressed with sweetness, and was apt to express a dread of displeasing; and a voice of such charm that it sometimes seemed the most powerful of all her attractions. But after seeing her often one was obliged to confess that the real salient points of her personality were not so easily to be discovered. She showed many varieties of demeanor and aspects of character—a sweet seriousness at times, and a continuous archness at others, while every mood was pervaded by French sparkle and grace.

The pony appeared presently, and she sprang into the low carriage, adjusted her blankets and wraps, and called her greyhound to the seat beside her.

"And you might come too, Aunt Laura," she said, her flexible lips touched with regret, "if it were not for this horrible Mr. Layton."

"Oh, Felise, I do not believe he is so horrible."

"But he must be. Uncle is charmed with him, and uncle is charmed with no one who does not suffocate me with his talk of 'drift' and 'glacial periods.'"

She laughed and drove down the short avenue, and soon reached the village street. Now, in all the world there is nowhere so pretty a village street as in Saintford, and Felise felt no meagre enjoyment at the sight of the splendid colonnade of trees on either hand, the young leaves covering the branches without hiding them, their pale green infused with sunshine. Here and there were graceful willow trees in whose blossoms the bees hummed incessantly. Felise seemed to remember everything—the tender springing grass, the stately elms, the buzzing of the innumerable bees, the bloomy vistas of apple-blossoms and the blue line of the sea. For she had been born here, and had stayed quite long enough, she felt, to allow her childish eyes and ears to gather a thousand memories of the old place. Everything pleased her—the tranquil village street, the cows grazing here and there, even the glimpse she had of two old men in the distance who had crawled out into the sunshine to talk over vanished spring-times.

"I shall be very quiet and very happy here," said Felise to herself with that profound wisdom which characterizes the young after they have a grain of experience. "I shall have only aunt and uncle to care about and to care about me: henceforth I shall be one of those women who have no history."

For, even although Felise had known somewhat of life, it had as yet made too little impression upon her to allow her to feel anxiety or to burden her with memories which pursued her. Men had loved her and wanted to marry her, and it may

be she had put imperishable wishes into wild hearts; but she had hitherto been like a child, and had experienced nothing but shame and vexation that her lovers had rather a troublesome time with their feelings, and had repeatedly opened her large eyes in profound surprise at the puerility of men.

She drove down the long street which led to the Sound, and she could see the water on the one hand and on the other the iridescent lights upon the awakening woods. And here she happened to come upon a pair of lovers sauntering along the path: the man at other times might be clownish enough, but was now instinct with feeling all over, while the girl was tender and rosy as a Psyche in this first flush of passion. It was the May Day of their lives, and no wonder if they seemed fair as the afternoon, and completed the picture which the sunshine and blue seas and the violets along the wood-path all suggested. It was completely in the nature of Felise to identify herself with her surroundings, and she stopped and begged the lovers to pick her some of the pale wood-blossoms; and she thanked the man so exquisitely when he pulled her a handful of violets that her smile and the sweetness of her voice were to give him a sense of loss hereafter, and to shadow for many a day the happiness he had felt in gaining the girl beside him.

Felise drove home with her flowers, and put them in her dress before she went down to dinner. She said within herself that a year ago Ralph Wylde was pulling sweeter violets than these for her, and that now the ocean rolled between them; and as this was the last thought which Felise was to give to her last year's lover, we will chronicle it, for it inspired the tender grace of the smile which she wore when she went into the parlor and was seized by her uncle and introduced to Mr. Frank Layton.

Frank met her bravely enough, and not one of the three to whom he talked indifferently and fluently until dinner was announced had any idea that anything especial was happening. But here at last he was sitting opposite the girl who had made an ineffaceable impression on him

without her receiving any intimation of his existence. He was devoured by curiosity concerning her—hungry to look into her face, of which he had dreamed so long—to listen to her voice; but it was necessary to follow Mr. Knight's conversation, and to treat Mrs. Knight with that deference which is to middle-aged matrons what devotion is to girlhood. Yet all the time he felt an intense consciousness that his torturing conflict of the ideal and real was over—that not only doubts had vanished, but any fragment of dilemma. Not only did idealism die a natural death, but he dated his thought of Felise henceforth from this moment of meeting, and his infatuation in the past seemed fantastic and illusory. Here was something so much better than a dream—a young girl, only divided from him by the width of the dinner-table, who possessed more than the beauty which he had coveted at first sight, addressing him frankly, and looking at him with some of the candid pleasure with which Miranda surveyed Ferdinand. For he was a delightful surprise to her: she had heard of him through his English cousins, the Merediths and Wylde, until she knew his traits by heart, and now could not imagine how he happened to be settled in Saintford. Mr. Knight wasted no curiosity upon trivial matters, and unquestioningly accepted Frank as a neighbor without suspecting any reason out of the common order of things. He was a bright-eyed, listless-looking man of sixty, rather worn with his lifelong work, but still eagerly interested in the widest range of the world's high energies, and when he found a worthy listener a most endless talker. Frank was in so generous a mood that his sympathies expanded wide enough to take in pre-historic ages, and his ready apprehension and good-natured tolerance lured his host into trotting out all his favorite hobbies. The ladies bore it for a while with faces of comic dismay: students in later life are apt to consider the world athirst for information, but Mrs. Knight at least had learned how to interrupt her husband and bring him back to trivialities.

"Now, Mr. Knight," she said, "Felise and I object to so many facts, and we will not listen to any more.—We like theorizing so much better, Mr. Layton."

"No woman can abide details," remarked Mr. Knight, turning back to his dinner with a sigh. "She can never realize that all the real work of the world has been achieved by the men who have a vision so microscopic that they positively burrow into the minutest particulars. My wife would like to have me never speak of science in public, but would perhaps allow me to sit in my library every morning, and with a gold pen in my hand and tinted paper before me construct theories which tally with her sentimental and theological views."

"The trouble with a scientific man," retorted Mrs. Knight, "is, that there is nothing complete about his ideas: his mind is full of confused thoughts, which he must talk over and over until they develop into something a little more advanced and a little more abstruse. We want distinct and fixed opinions upon which we may settle down comfortably and consider the subject finished."

"The fact is, Mr. Layton," said Mr. Knight, laughing, "the kind of man women believe in is a noisy, fluent, unscrupulous dogmatizer. You are not, I presume, a married man?"

Frank disclaimed any such experience.

"I am not sure that it is fair, then, for me to tell you anything about the sex," said Mr. Knight, "since their characters belong, for you, to the region of unexplored phenomena."

"But I am in the mood to compass a wider knowledge of women," returned Frank, "and should like to make all sorts of discoveries. Now, you are in a position to give me many new ideas."

"That is true enough. I have been married twenty-two years, and can preach by the book. It does seem a pity that the experience of the pioneers can be of use to no one where marriage is concerned, for, in this matter, beyond all others, by the time one's absolute knowledge amounts to anything, one is so deeply committed that it is impossible to go back."

"Now this becomes interesting," said Mrs. Knight. "Whether Mr. Layton needs your advice or not, I want you to go on."

Mr. Knight put back his head, closed his eyes and revolved the subject in his mind; then looked at his wife, nodded and began. "I should assert it not as an opinion, but as an incontrovertible fact," said he, "that there is nowhere such a shrinkage in value as in the dreams a man indulges in before his wedding-day." He sipped his wine thoughtfully, with a smile lurking around the corners of his mouth. "I was far from being young when I met my Laura," he pursued, "but nevertheless for some time after I saw her I was in a state of glamour. It appeared to me that my future happiness depended on the touch of slim satiny hands, the sweep of golden curls, the bewildering changes of silken toilettes of shimmering radiance, each breathing perfumes, the occasional glimpses of little feet, and the glances of eyes which I was never self-possessed enough to discover the color of in those days, and thought them blue of heaven's own hue, when all the time they were green — yes, Laura, green. Well, that period of illusion, Mr. Layton, was twenty-two years ago, and now to golden hair and eyes of heavenly azure I am quite indifferent; the rustle of a silk dress irritates me; I care only for the qualities which are intrinsically precious, and which lose nothing by the hand of time and show the same in every light."

"The union of kindred souls—" suggested Frank.

"Nothing of the sort, my dear sir. All the souls I have had a glimpse of are remarkably individual, and defy any fusing process. No, Mr. Layton, the color fades out of a woman's cheek even if she has the witchery of a Marie Stuart, and the touch of the softest hand becomes an every-day affair remarkably soon. But there is a positive immortality, for instance, in the faculty of ordering a dinner—in an intelligent view of the propriety of suiting meals to the exigencies of man, and not making man suit himself to meals. These qualities of mind exist long after the roses of youth have van-

ished and the sheen has faded from the golden hair. Similarly, a woman's dotting belief in her husband may gracefully increase with years, and time teaches her the art of flattering his weaknesses judiciously. She may also play his favorite music all her life, read aloud to him and copy his illegible manuscripts which he cannot himself decipher. She may prompt his memory of clever anecdotes at the right time, and enable him to shine in conversation without trouble: she can entertain the people who bore him while he smokes his cigar in peace, never forgetting to impress all the world with the fact of his towering intellect, and, besides all this, that at the same time he is simply the most irresistibly agreeable man in the universe."

"Find me such a wife, Mr. Knight!" cried Frank enthusiastically. "I have always wanted more than I possess, and now I discover what it was I wanted."

"I know of only one such woman," said Mr. Knight, drinking his wife's health. "But I began with very indifferent material: I assure you it's all in the training."

Mrs. Knight answered him with some badinage, and Frank turned his eyes toward Felise, who was listening to every one with a smile.

"I wonder," said he simply, "how you are going to like Saintford, Miss Clairmont?"

He told her of his summer plans. His aunt, Mrs. Meredith, and his cousin Violet were coming over for his brother's wedding, and would be at his cottage early in June.

"There seems to be some magic," she cried.

"Some magic—how?"

"I thought I had left everything behind me in England," said she. "I believed that I was going to be so stupid, so middle-aged now, and here come Violet and Mrs. Meredith, who always bring me events! Since you are the magician, you must manage your spirits, Mr. Layton."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "there is nothing occult about me. And if some magic is drawing all the spirits of the vasty deep to Saintford this summer, I am not to be held responsible for it. I have my own

ideas as to who the necromancer is. So you have been to drive to-day? Did you go to the woods? Those are wild violets you are wearing. Down in my flower-beds there are double English ones, some of which I shall send you to-morrow."

Felise put her hand to the little knot on her breast with a pretty gesture, and told him about the lovers she had met, the pretty picture they had made, and the request she made of them.

"It was the male lover who picked you the violets," suggested her uncle with an experienced air. "Every woman must compel every man she meets to be her slave, if only for a moment. The balance of power is well kept between the sexes: Michael Angelo with the last colors for his fresco drying on his brush probably found a high pleasure in picking up Vittoria Colonna's handkerchief. This little girl has enjoyed honors almost as great, Mr. Layton."

Frank's manner was eloquent enough as he followed Felise from the table. In fact, with less disenchantment than falls to the lot of many—for most of the goddesses we pursue turn to clouds when we grasp them—he had decided that his chase over two continents was now well rewarded when he saw Felise within his reach.

### CHAPTER III.

*Mrs. Meredith to Frank Layton.*

PARK LANE, London, 27 April.

YOURS reached me yesterday, my dearest Frank. It was very droll. Cromley had just been here asking if you were not to be in town for his wedding, and I had assured him that you must have had enough of the States by this time, and were without doubt on your way back to England, when, directly he had gone, your letter was brought to me. . . . So you are settling down in the country in the neighborhood of Miss Clairmont? And you give me such droll accounts of your experiences as a housekeeper: you tell me of Maurice's plans, and congratulate me on Violet's prospects. Finally, you inquire incidentally about the cir-

cumstances of Miss Clairmont's engagement to Ralph, and the causes of its sudden rupture. It is only a noble-hearted young man who would cheer his venerable aunt with such a delightful epistle, and I might reply by telling you about my new poodle and the tricks Leslie has taught him for me, the fogs which are enlivening this April morning with their chameleon hues, Lady Alice's presentation and other gossip of the first Drawing-room; but I hate to tease so dear a fellow, and accordingly will answer the spirit, not the words, of your letter.

For of course I was quite well aware a year ago that you were in love with Felise Clairmont. You men are so droll with your little efforts at disguise! Just *as if we did not know everything!* Besides, I like both you and Felise, and do not begrudge her my nephew. I only hope that you may speed in your wooing, and not some months hence emerge from your acquaintance with her a sadder and a wiser man.

Ralph met her at Nice two years ago. She went on into Italy, and he rushed home and informed his sisters that he was about to marry. Laura considered herself almost engaged to Lord Palliser, and Georgy has been promised to my poor boy Hubert ever since she was fifteen; but yet they were terribly upset by Ralph's news, and thought it a scandal for a Wylde to choose a penniless girl whom nobody knew anything about, half French and half American. But he asserted himself nobly, declared that he was the head of his family, master of his own actions, and that it suited him to raise this kneeling Esther and make a queen of her. Then, after subduing his womenkind, he followed Miss Clairmont to Florence, offered himself, and was *refused!* But Ralph is always persistent, and did not lose heart. He said that she was very young, very capricious, and scarcely knew her own mind. Of course no woman with her eyes open could refuse *him!* He was wiser than I expected, and the next spring he met her just as she reached England on her way to Liverpool to sail for the States, and she accepted him. Her uncle accordingly

postponed his voyage and took a house at Richmond for six months, and we saw the family constantly during the season.

I never quite understood Felise at that time. She did not care for Ralph, yet seemed a good little thing, and had promised to marry him in October. She was laughing, coquettish, disdainful, all in a breath: he was all fondness, bewilderment and jealousy. A man like Ralph is sure to be a despot or a slave, and she took pains to keep him on his knees. I have his own word for it: he never even kissed her forehead during their acquaintance, and had barely touched her hand with his lips. Her French breeding had something to do with it, and he respected her scruples, as he called them—never saw her alone, and was, in short, put through a course of training which might in time have transformed him into something less British and tiresome.

Laura and Georgy were delighted with her, and when they went down to their place in August she accompanied the girls for a month's visit. Her wedding-day was fixed for early in October, and her dresses were coming over from Paris. My little place in Devonshire was vacant just then, and Violet and I ran down for a few weeks before we went to Scotland, for Violet had taken wonderfully to Felise, and could not see enough of her. We were only separated from the Wylde by the length of the park, and saw each other constantly. In short, a modern Arcadia of five women and one man was perfecting itself when suddenly came the transformation-scene, by which all the actors were shifted into new and startling combinations.

Hubert came back from the East, and I wrote to him begging him to come down to Dudley and conclude his arrangements for his marriage, already so long postponed by his ambition to out-travel the Wandering Jew. He had been sufficiently in love with Georgy two years before, and by this time I expected his passion would have grown into romantic fervor. It was a most admirable match for him: he needs her money, for she has a clear eight thousand a year in her own right; she is pretty, and if dull and in-

sidid, it is only that Laura has trained her into that cold passivity which is so little calculated to fire a lover. But I told Hubert that she was just the girl to make him an excellent wife, and he came down and promised me to make his engagement certain at once.

He arrived just in time to join us as we were going across to Dudley to lunch. It was the sweetest day, and the Wylde were all on the terrace: Georgy greeted Hubert with radiant blushes, and the affair promised a delicious conclusion. Felise was not visible, and when I inquired for her they led us toward the house, and going up the steps we saw her sitting in one of the open French windows reading. She looked up as we approached, her arms crossed on the sill: she was dressed in pale blue, and the full light shone on her fair hair and exquisite face, and they stood out in wonderful relief from their setting of ruby-colored velvet curtains. Nothing but her supreme beauty could excuse Hubert's fascination. I saw the color go to his forehead and settle there. I knew the sign, and was prepared for all that followed. Georgy prattled away to him all through lunch about the absurdities of their Anglican curate, and her trouble in getting the books she wanted down from Mudie's, and he stared all the time at the girl opposite him. Afterward Felise sang: you know, perhaps, by this time, that she can sing so as to draw the angels out of heaven to hear her. Hubert, whose passion for music is more absolute even than his passion for beauty, went mad on the spot, and showed such a frenzy of feeling that Georgy burst into tears and left the room, poor girl! Violet and I took our infatuated idiot back to our own house as quickly as possible. There were no bounds to his devotion to Miss Clairmont, whom he wanted to marry on the spot. He glared at Ralph as we came away, and as soon as we were in the carriage poured his admiration for Felise into our unwilling ears. I listened in silence, and the moment we reached home I rang the bell and told Graves to pack Mr. Hubert's things at once, and to have the dog-cart at the

door in twenty minutes, as he was to take the five-o'clock train up to London. Hubert dared not disobey me, but went off in a towering rage and joined a yachting-party bound for Stornoway. I wrote a little note to Laura Wyldes after my boy had gone, and told her that he had been sentimental enough to consider himself a rose while Miss Clairmont played the part of nightingale. Georgy was quite heartbroken, and Ralph was desperately angry, and for the first time showed Felise what a bad temper lies under his grand manners. But Laura took Felise's part, as well as she might, for the poor little girl had been quite innocent of any coquetry in her manner with Hubert, and had good-naturedly sung song after song to him to lighten the dullness which pervaded the party.

Just at this time Mr. Meredith came home from his German baths for a month's visit, and, as you may understand, dreading nothing so much as a family party, he brought Lord Palliser down with him to ward off ennui. This quite reinstated us with the Wyldes, for Laura had been looking for an offer from his lordship for more than a year. You must know Palliser, my dear Frank. He is almost sixty, and as hideous as a Puritan's idea of Mephistopheles, but with the manners of an angel and a delightful voice, which utters in the gentlest, most deliberate way the wittiest and wickedest things you ever listened to. He has always laughed at the idea of marriage until of late, since the death of his only nephew, he has seen the necessity of providing an heir to his name, as otherwise the title lapses at his death. Every one recommended Laura to him: she is of good family, of suitable age and frightfully rich. Hence, when he jumped at the chance of coming down to my little place, when he might have gone to the best country-houses in the three kingdoms, we told each other at once that dear Laura's prospects were assured. I quite admired my disinterestedness in allowing these love-affairs to go on under my eyes, for nobody but a *passée belle* knows how "sharper than a serpent's tooth it is" to

have the men about one offering themselves to other women.

Lord Palliser came at five o'clock, and the Wyldes dined with us at eight. Laura looked a viscountess every inch of her—cold, elegant, *awful*. Georgy reminded me of Ophelia after her drowning. Felise was in rose-color, and had never been so pretty. Lord Palliser sat between me and Laura, but looked at Felise all the time we were at table, and as soon as he came into the drawing-room went to her at once. Ralph turned so sulky and disagreeable at this that I broke up the naughty little flirtation in the corner by asking Felise to sing. I wish you could have heard that hideous old lord humming love-songs in the hall after she had gone home.

"Good-night!" said I, lighting my candle and starting to go up stairs. "I shall hear of your serenading, I have no doubt, Lord Palliser, after all this practice."

He came and leaned over the balusters. "By Jove!" he exclaimed under his breath, "I believe I've gone out of my mind. I want to marry a woman whom I have seen to-night. I could love her like a boy."

"Why, of course you could, and of course you will," said I. "You had better offer yourself to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" he cried. "Oh, you're joking. That's too soon."

"The sooner the better. 'Nice customs curtesy to great kings.'"

"That is so," said he, wagging his ugly old head, "but there is a beautiful queen in the case here."

He walked up and down, and seemed at fever-heat, and quite disregarded Mr. Meredith's demand that he should join him in the smoking-room. "Gad! how she sang it!" he cried, and hummed one of Felise's songs in his broken old voice all the time I was on my way to my own room. I had a headache next day, and did not come down until evening, when I fell a victim to the injustice of my family. Mr. Meredith positively would not speak to me, and Violet put on airs of the most ridiculous virtue. As for Lord Palliser, he had gone. It seemed that I had misunderstood his meaning, and

thus misled him. He had been speaking of Felise instead of poor dear Laura, and had gone over to Dudley that morning, asked for Miss Clairmont and begged her to go walking with him in the park. Felise had refused, and he had sought Laura and told her of his admiration for the young girl, my approval of his suit, and his hopes of her co-operation.

I have never to this day heard the particulars of the storm which burst over Dudley. I have never met any of them since, for they fully believe that it was malice instead of absent-mindedness which prevented my mentioning Ralph's engagement to my lord, and are inexorable in consequence. But Violet told me of Ralph's furious anger at his fiancée's second unlucky conquest, and of some of the insults he heaped upon her. Felise of course broke the engagement at once: her uncle came for her and they went on the Continent for six weeks. Ralph followed her there as soon as his anger had cooled, and tried in vain to induce her to give him another trial, but it was of no use. She was at no loss for opportunities of settling in England if she had wished, for Hubert rushed back from the Hebrides at the news of her freedom, and Lord Palliser followed her to Biarritz.

She wrote to me before she sailed for America. She said she forgave me (what could she mean?), and that, although she had been greatly annoyed, it was better that her engagement to my nephew Ralph should be broken off, since it had been entered into unwillingly, endured doubtfully, and now that it was ended she felt a sense of security and peace which had been quite foreign to her all the months in which she had been looking forward to an uncongenial marriage. That is the story, my dear Frank. Was it not all very droll? . . .

Yes, Violet and I intend to accept your kind invitation for the summer. She is anxious to be at Maurice's wedding, while I am longing to watch your little affair with Miss Clairmont. Besides all that, I have some curiosity to see America with my own eyes, for we read such droll stories about the ways and doings of

the Americans. We shall sail the first of June. Mr. Meredith declares our going to be — folly. But I am used to that. You know as much as I can tell you about Violet's engagement. You can realize how glad we are to have her make any reasonable match, and are much pleased that her choice fell on Leslie Wilmot.

With love for yourself and Maurice, I am, *sans adieu*, your loving aunt,

AGNES.

#### CHAPTER IV.

FRANK LAYTON was ready to echo the words of Felise when she declared that some magic was at work in bringing every one to Saintford, for no sooner had he made all his arrangements to receive his aunt and cousin in June than his old friend, Harry Morton, an Englishman on a tour in America, dropped unexpectedly down upon him. That Morton stayed beneath his roof but two nights, and then took lodgings in the village for a month, did not materially lighten a certain burden of doubt which Frank felt, for his quandary had reference not to his own comfort, but to the feasibility of his friend's renewing a long-past acquaintance with the Merediths. Morton had been Hubert Meredith's tutor twelve years before, and Violet, then just sixteen years old and the maddest of high-spirited girls, had begged her father to allow her a course of English literature under this young gentleman, whose appearance pleased her. Mrs. Meredith was away at the time, and the governess was a tranquil Dutch soul who reveled in sentiment, and watched the love-affair, which progressed rapidly, with tears in her eyes and poetry on her lips. Only a few readings from Shakespeare were needed to convince both Morton and Violet that they were a second Romeo and Juliet, and the night-winds of Verona never heard more passionate vows of constancy than they exchanged in the wide gardens of Meredith Grange. But Mrs. Meredith's return brought a sudden change. She read through Morton's love-letters before his face, laughed and said that this Ovidian style of composition was not in-

cluded in the course of lessons he had been engaged to give her daughter, and burned them on the hearth one by one. "It is really a pity," she said, looking up at the young man, "for your essays in that class of literature are pretty—very pretty indeed—but so full of droll mistakes that it is better not to preserve them. Now bring me my daughter's exercises."

No one had any doubt but that Violet had long since forgotten this episode except as a memory to smile over, but Frank was in doubt concerning Morton, who in the twelve years passed by Miss Meredith in a life like a continuous fête had managed to gain himself a wide reputation as a novelist. He had begun by being a poet, and had thought highly of his poetry, to which the world was indifferent, and had ended by writing fiction, which he despised, but which found a ready market and readers in both hemispheres. But Frank knew his friend intimately, and knew that his heart was not in his work, and that his success gave him no more satisfaction than he would have felt at the rewards he gained from any trade. He was naturally a very sincere person in his words and actions, and in the realm of poetry he could be true to himself: in fiction he was, he always said, merely ingenious, and he never pressed his heart into the service of his imagination. He had no enthusiasm for his fictitious heroes and heroines, and always declared that their sentiments and actions were independent of motive, and that their ultimate welfare depended on whatever mood controlled him when he awoke in the morning. The truth was, he was a disappointed man: he had taken the fever of life too early, and his symptoms since had been those resulting from his having experienced a violent chill which drove the disease in. Frank Layton had never quite understood his malady until one day, a year before our story opens, he was walking with him in Rotten Row. Morton's arm was in Frank's, and suddenly he felt him shake, and was grasped with a clutch that positively made him stagger. Frank said nothing, but suddenly observed that Violet Mere-

dith was within six feet of them, leaning over the side of her mother's carriage and talking to two or three men on horseback. Morton's pale face showed a bright red spot on either cheek for hours after, and though he never alluded to the encounter, for a time the zest seemed gone from everything he did. This mood was the clew to a certain indifference in look and manner which at times clouded him in an impenetrable reserve, and at all times governed him more or less. Now, however, that he was in Saintford, and knew that Miss Meredith was soon to arrive, he had so evidently brightened that the situation aroused Frank's apprehensions.

"I suppose you know that my cousin is engaged," he said to Morton, "and that not many months are to elapse before she marries Leslie Wilmot?"

"I know that the papers have not yet tired of announcing the fiançailles," Morton returned. "I have seen Wilmot: he is a stout, freckled boy."

"I allow all that," said Frank, laughing; "but when 'a stout, freckled boy' is heir to an estate with a rent-roll which a prince might be glad of, he is quite as fascinating as if he could boast of chiseled features and hyperion curls."

Morton held his tongue, but stood his ground. He claimed to have discovered a peculiar charm in Saintford, and having a novel to finish before October, decided that he could write better here than elsewhere. Frank did his best for him, and established him comfortably in a quiet little house, introduced him to all the people he knew, launched him at the residence of Mrs. Dury, a charming widow, and even took him up the hill to Mr. Knight's and presented him to Miss Clairmont, which seemed almost needless generosity on his part when Felise appeared at once to like the author. In person Morton was rather ugly in most people's estimation, but distinguished-looking, with a slender figure, very expressive dark eyes, and a smile which, though infrequent, showed singular sweetness. In manner he was one of the quietest of men, but never seemed dull, although he was no talker; for he

had a way of occasionally uttering those genial cynicisms which coincide with everybody's experiences, but which only clever people can reduce to axioms; and perhaps these rare epigrams gave him a reputation for wit which more prolixity would have imperiled. Frank, who had long been on a footing of easy intimacy with him, and who enjoyed his society without ever yielding up his own native impassibility, found Morton a pleasant companion in the little country place. They dined together usually, after a long morning spent by Morton in a pretence at least of literary occupation, and by Frank as often as possible in the society of Miss Clairmont. Afterward they strolled about the village streets, seizing in fact almost any pretext for idleness. Maurice was often with his brother for a night, counting all the hours he passed at the cottage as happily canceled. He made little trips north and south, east and west, and returned with impatient accounts of the general insufficiency of things to amuse him. Wherever he went he was treated as a state guest, he affirmed with disgust, and was taken to inspect asylums.

"I can understand," he complained to Frank, "why it is an object, as a means of gay recreation, to show a man in my position lunatic and inebriate asylums, but why those for idiots?"

Frank told him that it was one of those delicate questions he did not like to venture on investigating, and always offered to put a red day in his calendar by taking him to see Miss Clairmont; but this pleasure his brother constantly postponed. He was to spend the final ten days before his wedding with Frank, and declared that he preferred to wait until that time before meeting Felise, since the last hours of his suspense promised to be particularly heavy. His efforts to get rid of this terrible interregnum were the cause of great mirth with both Frank and Morton.

"Is your brother in love?" the latter asked. "I confess I don't think he is; so you need not commit yourself. But tell me something about Miss Clifford. Is she beautiful?"

"Well, no. But she has an exquisite complexion, fine eyes—in brief, half a dozen good points; but the result is something less than beauty."

"Like Dido, for instance," remarked Morton. "I always fancied Dido missed beauty, somehow; not that she was in the least ugly, but if she had been a little more like Helen of Sparta or Miss Clairmont, for instance, Æneas would never have left her to settle Italy."

Frank flinched slightly at the mention of Felise, whose name he perhaps thought should only be uttered by ordinary mortals with genuflections.

"Well," said he, "I am glad Dido was not handsomer, then; but I do not lament that Helen of Sparta was irresistible and a trifle inclined to make mischief, for we should have lacked something if the Greeks had not invaded the stronghold of Priam to reclaim her. No, Miss Clifford is certainly no Helen, but she has a fine intellect: her preference is an immense compliment to a man, and her flattery might acquire as powerful an influence over any of us as the sweetest face in the world. I do not myself mind her lack of beauty so much as I do that of charm. However, it is a great match. Maurice knows himself to be a lucky fellow."

"But wishes the fuss well over," remarked Morton. "I confess, with a prospect of average happiness, I think I could quite enjoy my antenuptial meditations."

Frank did not express his convictions. he was on his way to Mrs. Knight's to take dinner, and left Morton behind him. It was early June now, and after the meal was over he and Felise went out into the garden. It was a quiet, old-fashioned garden, with clumps of box alternating precisely with syringas and lilacs; but meanwhile roses and honeysuckles had clambered riotously from one point of support to another, and now in their light luxuriance of leaf and blossom laughed at the formal squares of the primitive arrangement. Yet there was a quaint foreign air about it all, from the stiff marble urns, now freshly filled with bright flowers, to the fountain, where a

cracked, discolored Hebe held out her goblet with a grace which should have made one forget that the goddess was ever younger or fairer than she appeared here; for, although time had washed all clearness from the features of her face and made ugly fissures in the sculptured perfections of her form, she went blithely on, even in her decay offering the draught of the gods to all who approached her.

Frank had gone to the fountain with Felise to feed the gold-fish a little too often not to have experienced the intoxication of the goddess's nectar. Indeed, by this time he made small secret of his state of mind, for he had spoken to both Mr. and Mrs. Knight about his wishes, and received their permission to visit their house as intimately as he chose, and win the young girl if he could. Mr. Knight had never before liked any of the men who sought his niece; but Frank Layton was the pleasantest companion he had ever found, since he had studied deeply enough into Nature and science to be by no means indifferent to those high results which the old scientist considered the end of life, and had lived all his life in the sphere of thought of those who know and do the best that is achieved in the world.

As for Mrs. Knight, she had yielded at once to the quiet charm which was one of Frank's gifts, liking his handsome tranquil face and limpid eyes, his admirable training and habitual observance of the best usages, his pleasant voice and his manner of saying agreeable things. This was of course a superficial judgment, but women argue very well when they say that even if a man has mastered the world, unless he has meanwhile mastered himself there remains a good deal for him to conquer before they recognize his absolute capacity. In fact, Mrs. Knight did not try to conceal her candid enthusiasm for him. In a week she had made up her mind that he was the one man in the world for Felise to marry, and that the finger of Providence was startlingly visible both in the circumstances which had first made him aware of her existence, and in those which

had afterward preserved her for him. Accordingly, she had mentally planned out their future in each other's society, even to the number of children they would have and what their names should be, with that delicious absence of good sense, combined with wild freedom of conjecture, which characterizes the mature feminine mind in the presence of a possible romance.

However, Mrs. Knight was exquisitely discreet, and had never parted with Frank's secret to Felise, whose state of mind toward her new suitor it would be difficult to portray. She had been a little disconsolate in returning to America to settle, for her strongest associations were all with the Old World, and she had felt—with that incapacity for believing that her present state of feeling was not final which is the attribute of young minds—that everything she could hold precious was left behind her. The world had seemed very wide to her, and its immensity made her hopeless of ever finding anything of her own again. The succession of experiences which had passed over her had not moved her feelings enough to develop her from the dreaming child she had always been. She had never known her father, her mother had died when she was but seven years old, and her childhood had been so desolate that when, on the death of her father's sister, she was claimed by her maternal aunt, the young girl, just sixteen, had felt a happiness absolutely rapture in having loving arms to nestle in. She had been so far from experiencing any need of a stronger love than this homeliness that her very health had suffered from the irksomeness of having lovers to torture her with adoration. All her life she had been brought up to have housekeeping cares, servants to manage, exigent guardians to provide with amusement and interest, and her imagination had been fully employed: she had had no chance for ennui and had read no novels. If thoughts of her possible fate occurred to her, they still came like half-veiled glimmerings of light, and she bowed before them as before a divine presence. She was unaffectedly religious,

and, although nominally Protestant, had lived with Catholics so long that she had many of their artless habits of thought. She wanted to be happy, *very* happy; but above all she wanted to be good, *very* good. But hitherto none of her needs had framed themselves in absolute formulas, and she was guiltless of devising any of those axioms of self-comprehension and self-guidance which more self-conscious women often make for themselves when very young.

Meeting Frank Layton in Saintford was so agreeable a surprise that he instantly influenced the direction of all her thoughts. He had told her at once of their two chance rencontres in Paris, and although he had not said that he had followed her here, she had probably divined it, and in return for his modest disclosures, upon which he based no requisitions, she gave him her intimate friendship, which no other man had ever had, with a tacit reliance which, however it might encourage hope in the future, taught him to master any indiscretions such as his love would have been but too ready to betray him into had she evinced the least coquetry in her behavior. She was feminine in every instinct: it was natural for her to accept the homage he rendered her with a shy pleasure at the eloquence of such mute devotion, and with a shy avoidance, as well, of appearing to accept it. Frank was experienced in women, and was not slow in recognizing the fact that with all her superficial knowledge of life she was absolutely fresh at heart, and that the man who won her now would have the first stirring of womanly feeling, of passionate worship.

Frank's requirements of Fate were none of the smallest, but he felt very well satisfied this afternoon as he held the bread for Felise while she fed the gold-fish. When it was all gone the two sat down side by side upon the turfy bank around the fountain. The afternoon shadows were lengthening; all about the place the grand elms stood motionless in the calm June air; from the flower-thickets came the last drowsy hum of bees as they tumbled out of the honeysuckles drunk with sweets and flew homeward;

here and there fluttered down a rose-leaf, the only suggestion which could have taught a lover that "time could come and take his love away," and that he must weep in having that which he was forced to lose. Felise's pet rabbits peered in and out of the shrubberies, nibbling at the clover, and every now and then above the patter of the fountain sounded the whir of wings as her white doves flew from the graveled path over into the garden.

"Aunt Agnes and Violet will be here next week," said Frank. "You must help me to find amusement for them. But these people who are so used to gayety are so easily amused."

"Yes: that is their habit," returned Felise. "Now, I am quite stupid and countrified in my ways: I am getting altogether unamusable."

Felise, although she spoke English of remarkable purity, nevertheless gave a delicious accent to some of her words, and when she called herself stupid she was completely irresistible.

"Stupid!" repeated Frank. "Perhaps it is I whom you think stupid: I come too often. You need a little variety: you shall have a ball if you like. I know you are fond of dancing. Or what is it you like best?"

"It seems to me," cried Felise, "that I was never happier in my life than I am to-day. I have been so busy. This morning I made the crisp cakes my uncle likes; afterward I read to him, and made notes as we went along; I helped Aunt Laura at her sewing; I gardened and picked flowers for the dinner-table. Now, it is so pleasant to be idle. Is not the day sweet? I look up and see the white clouds in the blue sky, and I feel at peace. It will not be so when your aunt and Violet come. Do not fancy I do not love them, for they are my dear friends. But they put me in a fever. 'Ah,' Violet will say, 'let us do something;' and then I shall get into mischief."

"No, I intend to take care of you," observed Frank. "But if you are happy, what do you suppose these days are to me, Felise?"

"I think you deserve to be very hap-

py," said she, blushing, for he had never called her by her Christian name before.

"You can make me happy at any time," he returned kindly, but without ardor, which he had been taught to hold well in check. "Don't let Violet teach you to torture me: she is an accomplished girl, but do not learn any lessons of her, Felise. You do not mind," he said, dropping his voice, "if here, alone, this pleasant afternoon, I call you Felise?"

His look and tone overmastered her a little. She drooped her head. "No," she answered with the air of a frightened child.

Whether to speak or not was the question at his heart. He counted the days he had known her, and, alas! they were but twenty-four. He could be prompt and direct enough on occasion, but had been warned to loiter a little here. He put the temptation behind him with a sigh, and although his instinct taught him the opportunity was a golden one, and not often to be renewed, he decided that his story was telling itself to her all the time, and could fix itself in her breast.

Neither of them broke the silence which had settled over them, and the air grew more and more golden as the sun sank. What startled them both was the sound of a laugh and voice.

"That is Maurice," exclaimed Frank, springing to his feet as Mrs. Knight advanced down the steps of the terrace with a gentleman quite strange to Felise, but who was nevertheless looking at her with a sort of recognition, or at least expectation, as if she were the person he was seeking. "Why, Maurice," Frank went on, shaking hands cordially with the new-comer, "what a good fellow you are to follow me here!"

"The best of fellows," returned his brother, "if there be any virtue in being utterly worn out with waiting for you three hours without a morsel to eat. But introduce me properly to Mrs. Knight and Miss Clairmont, for I have intruded most unceremoniously upon them. The fact was, I strolled to the gate, heard voices on the piazza, took it for granted you were there, and entered."

"I assure you no apology is required,"

said Mrs. Knight. "We are delighted to see Mr. Frank Layton's brother. Felise dear, let me introduce Mr. Layton to you."

Maurice bowed very low: his manners on such occasions were always a little grand, but now he was dazzled by the beauty of the young girl, which, set off in its faint light by the background of dark greenery, seemed to him ravishing.

"So you came at three o'clock, Maurice?" observed Frank, looking at his watch. "I thought you were safe at Oaklands for twenty-four hours more."

"On the contrary, I find myself in Saintford and—in peril," retorted Maurice. "Yes, I arrived at three o'clock, walked from the station and entered your place by the little gate under the willows. Hearing the tinkle of a guitar, I followed the sound, and discovered Luigi playing romanzas in the summer-house while he smoked one of your best cigars. I inquired for his master, and he informed me I should find him here, and added, '*E ben trovato.*'"

Frank was disconcerted, and pulled his moustache. "Now, I will take you home," said he, "feed you, and make up for your cool reception."

"I do not want to go: I prefer Mrs. Knight's garden," rejoined Maurice. "Besides, Mr. Knight obligingly remarked to me that everybody was to have strawberries and cream presently, and that he hoped I would join them."

"Yes," put in Mrs. Knight hospitably, "we were going to have tea out of doors, and every one must stay for it. But if you have not dined, Mr. Layton—"

"Oh, dear madam, I have dined," said Maurice, who meant that he had dined twenty-four hours before. "I am ready to live on rose-leaves, any ethereal food that you offer me." And he followed Felise and sat down beside her on the garden-bench.—"Miss Clairmont," he began, "Frank has not yet forgiven me for interrupting the story he was telling you, but I hope you are more lenient."

"He was not telling me anything," said Felise, looking up at Frank, who stood before her. "I cannot remember that we were speaking at all."

"Ah! that is the way intercourse is carried on in Saintford—without words! I have come to spend a week or more with my brother, Miss Clairmont, and I am ready for any form of enjoyment. I have had so many tedious minutes lately, but now I see a way of getting through the ensuing fortnight comfortably. Why should I not have one glimpse of pleasure, like that given to novitiates before they take the veil? What beguilements does Saintford offer to a bachelor, Mrs. Knight?"

"We poor women have few beguilements: we are very humdrum, but put on our prettiest dresses and display them to your brother, who devotes himself to a widow. You should ask him concerning beguilements."

"Is Frank in love with a widow? I suspected there was some element of attraction in Saintford. In that case, Miss Clairmont, why may I not devote myself to you?"

"I think any sort of beguilement quite incompatible with your position as bridegroom elect," said Frank, laughing. "I feel it my duty at once to inquire about Miss Clifford."

"She is very well. But don't rattle my chains before Miss Clairmont. Rosamond is extremely busy receiving presents and trying on articles of her trousseau, which is just in from Paris after a torturing delay. I have brought you a note of thanks for your present, Frank.—I assure you, Mrs. Knight, he did it handsomely, and the gift is superb. In fact, the wedding sacrifices are all so costly and magnificent that I was glad to get away from all necessity of exclaiming over them."

"Don't put on airs," suggested Frank: "a great many men have been married before."

"And lived through the ordeal. That reflection supports me in the present crisis."

Tea was ready on the terrace by the east piazza, the prettiest nook of all the place, where moss-roses and honey-suckles grew. In front they could see the sunset flush on the water, and the light from the west struck through the

colonnade of trees that surrounded the grassy lawn. Mrs. Knight poured out the tea, and Felise carried it about to the gentlemen as if she were a child, and piled their plates with strawberries. She was dressed in half-transparent white, her wonderful hair of pale gold tied up with blue ribbon and floating on her shoulders. She wore heavy gold chains wound about her arms, and they constantly slipped over her wrists and impeded her hands unless she held them back. Maurice's eyes were riveted upon her, and his attention seemed absorbed by the movement of the little fingers to the troublesome ornaments. Mr. Knight was talking to him and required constant answers, but the necessity of maintaining the conversation was irksome to him: he felt inclined to yield himself to the influence of the pretty domestic scene. Nobody seemed to notice the young girl except himself. Frank was apparently taken up with Mrs. Knight: Morton had dropped in, and was teaching the little greyhound, Zoo-Zoo, to hold a piece of cake on his nose until he counted ten. They might all regard this sort of thing with the unconcern of habit, but Maurice had not often been served by a woman who pleased his eyes so exquisitely. He found himself drinking cup after cup of a beverage he usually rejected, just that he might watch the little hands grasp the sugar-tongs and the wistful glances of her eyes as she sought the easiest attainable lumps, and then meet her smile as she asked if that were right. She took no pains to entertain any one, but when Mr. Knight had finished his tea he drew her to him, and putting her arm about his neck, patted his time-worn cheek with her little hand while he talked to his guest. Maurice now and then appealed to her, when she answered in a way that showed her mind alert and interested in what they were saying, but she offered no remarks on her own account.

The sun had quite gone, and the luminous blue seemed all at once merged in golden light, for transparent clouds had stolen up from the sea, spreading over the vault above until now they

absorbed all the splendors of the west. Above, it seemed a radiant sphere of glory, and it changed the color of the trees and grass beneath until everything seemed touched with a rarer charm.

"We must go in," said Mr. Knight.  
"It will be damp presently."

Maurice, as he walked along the terrace by the side of Felise, said to himself, not for the first time, that she was the prettiest creature he had ever seen.



## PART II.

### CHAPTER V.

MAURICE had been but three days at the cottage when Mrs. Meredith and Violet arrived and made the domestic circle complete. Mrs. Meredith, the youngest sister of the mother of the Laytons, was now well past forty, but still retained much of the spirituel beauty of her youth. She was a brilliant, eccentric woman of fashion, who had led her world for years, although she had made the mistake of a foolish marriage, having at seventeen broken off an auspicious engagement, approved by her family, to run away with Hubert Meredith, the only son of a Catholic gentleman who had married an Italian woman of superb beauty but doubtful antecedents. The good looks he inherited from his Roman mother had proved to be young Meredith's sole recommendation, and these, with some of his other characteristics, were repeated in his children. Violet had inherited all the pride, passion and obstinate self-will of her ancestors, and with remarkable beauty had been able to indulge a caprice for thoughtless flirting which had injured her chances of marriage. She had been engaged over and over again: why should we dwell upon the pitiful stories which were told concerning her love-affairs? She seemed to take a pleasure in disappointing not only her lovers, but her friends, and in setting the world to wondering at her behavior. She was now engaged to Leslie Wilmot, a good-hearted, generous boy, several years younger than herself, and heir to very large estates; but as she had already refused his request to be married at Easter, and made no promises for the autumn, her present caprice in coming to America for the summer had filled the breasts of her family with lively convictions of the insecurity of temporal things. Perhaps one man held the clew to much of this irresponsible behavior: at least Maurice Layton had often remembered with a mixture of shame and disgust a

promise she had made him ten years before—a purely disinterested promise which he had been far enough from requiring at her hands—that she would never marry until he was entirely beyond her reach. He could not help recalling this when she sent him word that she was coming over to his wedding.

The ladies arrived late at night, and it was ten o'clock next morning before Mrs. Meredith came down from her room, and finding no one, went peering about the library and parlors, glass at eye, half in curiosity to see what manner of house the outside barbarians of America lived in, and half in search of her nephew. She arched her brows at his priceless Psyche, and raised her hands at an Etruscan vase; then, seeing Frank outside, she parted the curtains and stepping out of the open French window upon the terrace, went down the walk to meet him. "I discover," said she, "that I am in Paradise."

"Do you like my little place?"

"Immensely. I've been prying all over your house. It is as pretty as need be, and some of your trifles must have cost a world of money; but, better than all that, one can live in your rooms. You know, from sad experience, that our tumble-down old Grange always suggests a place to die in."

She was so petite a woman that Frank could lift her in his arms: he did so now, kissed her on both cheeks, then placed her on the garden-bench and sat down beside her. But although her stature was not mighty, she carried more state in her presence than many women with a third more inches. In her youth her admirers had declared that she resembled Marie Antoinette, and the likeness had settled her style of dress for life: she always wore a profusion of lace over pale rich silks in the evening, and, no matter what was the prevailing fashion, the masses of her fair hair were drawn high over a slight cushion. The result

was, if not a resemblance to the unfortunate queen, at least an extraordinary grace and piquancy added to her arched chiseled features.

"I slept well," she returned in answer to her nephew's inquiries: "it seemed such a comfort to be on land and in a bed again. I was seasick to an unearthly degree all the way over. I used to wonder dimly in my agony why we were coming to America, and had a vague consciousness that we were what my husband declared, the two idiots of the universe, to have renounced a firm footing on earth for the animated calamity of a steamer which was equally horrible to hear, to smell and to feel. But now, the 'billows past,' I am glad we came."

"Now you want some breakfast? Here is Luigi for orders. Will you wait for Violet?"

"I should as soon think of waiting for angels to descend: their comings are equally uncertain. But I do not wish to go inside. Why can we not breakfast here?"

"We will breakfast in the summer-house, Luigi."

"Is not Maurice up?" asked Mrs. Meredith in an injured tone, looking at her watch.

"Oh yes: Maurice is out of bed at six o'clock, and settled down after breakfast by seven."

"How very droll! Why is he not here taking care of me? What is your man's name?"

"Luigi."

"Luigi, take Mrs. Meredith's love to Mr. Layton and ask him to breakfast with her in the summer-house.—Frank, I suppose that is the little Italian beggar you picked up?"

"Yes: is he not a handsome fellow?"

"Altogether too handsome for a servant. Absolutely, there comes Violet!—Good-morning, dearest child. Did you sleep, or did you feel the motion of the ship?"

"I generally sleep," returned Violet, kissing her mother and offering her bloomy cheek to Frank. "In fact, in this life of ours the difficulty is to do

anything else. What a nice little house you have, Frank! My room is the prettiest I ever slept in. What fine roses!" And walking to a rosebush, she stripped it of blossoms and put them in her hair and in her belt. She was a beautiful woman, but beyond her beauty she impressed the most casual beholder with the distinction of her manner, voice and most trivial gesture. She always dressed with daring simplicity in the morning, and now wore a white lawn made like a peignoir, but as she stood there decking herself with roses, only less rich and glowing than her own vivid coloring, she needed nothing in the way of art to make the picture complete.

"How well you are looking, Violet!" remarked Frank with undisguised admiration.

"Am I not? I expected to be green and yellow after my voyage, but, on the contrary, it quite set me up. Besides, you know, I've been and got engaged since I saw you, Frank, and contentment is the true beautifier. Weren't you glad to hear there was a chance of my settling at last?"

"I never was so relieved in my life," asseverated Frank. "I have always been haunted by the fear of having to marry you myself in order to keep you out of mischief."

"What a nice idea! I can imagine nothing more charming. If you will only offer yourself now, I will go in and write a little note to Leslie telling him that circumstances over which I have no control, etc.—Then I will marry you tomorrow. You are not so rich as he is, but then you are several inches taller, which is a fortune in itself. It is so dreadful to be obliged to waltz with a man who only comes up to one's chin. But after I am really married to Leslie I shall never be forced to dance with him nor take his arm, so that one of my acutest sources of suffering will be over."

"I don't seem to remember Leslie, but he has grown up since I was much in London. I know his family very well—thoroughly nice people."

"Yes. Papa Wilmot is the fine old English gentleman entirely, and Mam-

ma Wilmot is a fine lady, as only a woman born to wealth, and not to station, can be a fine lady. No end of money is coming to Leslie."

"I am glad you are satisfied at last."

"Oh, we are satisfied—aren't we, mamma? Why should I not be satisfied, Frank? I am twenty-eight years old. Once I had limitless aspirations, vague desires, sentiments, dreams, despair! Now I like jewels, lace, china, good dinners and more money than my neighbors. Youth is the season of discontent: I am getting so philosophical! And you and Maurice are both settling down, dear cousin?"

"I have got a house, at all events; and it is something for me to have a home who have had none since I was thirteen years old."

Violet gave a grimace: "You're almost pathetic. Thank your stars that you have had none if the absence of a home has left you any belief in it."

"Oh, Violet!" exclaimed Mrs. Meredith, "you are too cynical."

"Only matter-of-fact, mamma. What is home to most people, from peers down to peasants, but the spot that is sacred to the secret failings, meannesses, tempers, dreariness and dullness of a family whom one is happy to escape from? Give me the outside world instead, where people wear their best manners and offer sweet smiles, kind words and bright thoughts."

"There comes Maurice, and I see cups and saucers in the distance," said Mrs. Meredith. "I shall be glad of a cup of tea: I don't know how people can be epigrammatic before breakfast.—How are you, my dear Maurice?"

Maurice entered the summer-house and kissed his aunt's little hand. "Are you well, Pansy?" he went on, addressing his cousin after he had responded to his aunt's affectionate greetings. Violet answered his motion toward her by extending two fingers. "Just as you say," said he with a provoking smile. "If you are indifferent to my modest civilities, I will not bore you."

"Your modest civilities mean so little."

"I never found modesty to succeed with women," he retorted. "How do you like

my audacity?" And he kissed her, but Violet gave no token of preferring his audacity.

"I like breakfast out of doors in June," said Maurice, sitting down. "I had a chop and a cup of coffee hours ago, Aunt Agnes, but this sort of thing tempts me into eating again. I will have some strawberries and cream."

"I delight in everything rural and rustic," observed Mrs. Meredith. "I should like to dress like Watteau's ladies, and go about with a crook and live out of doors. All my tastes are pastoral, and nothing but the want of a few sheep and a good-looking shepherd prevents my turning shepherdess at once."

"I know plenty of sheep," said Maurice; "and if I were not obliged to get married next week, I should like nothing better than bucolics, and would pipe to you all the day long."

"Harry Morton is here," put in Frank, "and I have no doubt he will rejoice to play 'ye gentle shepherd.'"

"Harry Morton!" cried Violet. "You surely do not mean Hubert's old tutor?"

"But I do, though. I knew it would be a surprise to you, pleasant or unpleasant as the case might be. He has been in America six months, and is at present settled down here finishing a novel."

"How exceedingly droll!" exclaimed Mrs. Meredith. "He shall put me in his book. His novels are very clever, and I always tell people their author is an old crony of mine. He is witty, but an awful radical. I feel myself a burden to society while I am reading his works."

"I'm a radical myself," said Violet: "I never could see that I am any better than our gardener's wife. In fact, she is the better woman and Christian of the two."

"Nonsense! Why don't you go and marry the under-gardener? Molly the housemaid has dismissed him. As for radicals, I've no faith in them: they're all thoroughpaced snobs, who would throw over an 'affable archangel' for the sake of dining with a lord. But they tell a good story of Morton, and the way he put down Lord Randal. They were both

dining with a party at Richmond, and Morton was quite the hero of the night, and kept the whole table in a tumult over his witticisms. 'By Jove!' cried Randal, who is always a fool, but a greater fool than ever after dinner, 'why aren't you in society, Morton? I should like to introduce you to my mother. Such a clever fellow ought to be a gentleman.' Morton turned and smiled at him. 'Are you a gentleman, Lord Randal?' he asked in the sweetest way. 'Of course I am: who says I ain't?' shrieked out poor Randal, glaring around the table. 'Why, then,' murmured Morton with a puzzled air, 'how could a clever fellow be a gentleman?'

Violet laughed. "Yet," said she, "Mr. Morton would give all his brains to have been born a gentleman, as the phrase goes."

"The phrase is worn out," retorted Frank. "Morton is as good a gentleman as any man I know."

"Oh, I have no doubt," said Violet with her arch, mutinous smile, "that he will be received as such in the kingdom of heaven, where we are told that earthly titles, rank, precedence and other dross shall vanish away. But don't fear, Frank, that I shall not be very good to him. He deserves it, for, as somebody said before me, 'he loved me once.'"

"That is," remarked Maurice, "he made you believe so."

"I hope he is amusing: I long to be amused."

"I never found him amusing. Why should you long to be amused?"

"Do not look so scornful," retorted Violet with one of her swift, brilliant glances at her cousin. "To be sure, amusement is exclusively a masculine privilege in this tiresome world, where society has endeavored by every possible combination of usage, formula and tradition to make the weight of ennui enforced perfectly insupportable to us women. Everything conspires to render your existence easy and agreeable. You have the first choice of pleasures: our ambitions, knowledge, emotions even, come to us second-hand. We have scarcely an independent source of pleasure. Our lives are made

by the books we read, the conversations we hear, the variations of folly in our lovers. Mr. Morton was clever when I knew him, with little parrot-talk or simian modelings of himself upon other men's ideas and manners."

"I dare say he has not grown uninteresting. Amuse yourself by all means, my dear Pansy," said Maurice in a tone which indicated high moral intention, "but don't fail to remember one thing which women are always forgetting—that amusement brings cruel consequences at times. Your sex has some intuitions, but you always fail to recognize one crude and startling fact—that causes have effects and effects causes. A man readily sees that a lighted fuse will in time burn into the magazine, but you believe the powder non-inflammable, or think the match will go out, or if you for a moment catch a glimpse of possible danger, you shrug your white shoulders and say, 'Va! après nous le déluge.'"

"You are a very poor preacher, Maurice," exclaimed Violet, laughing, "but you never lose a chance of being severe upon women. Yet the *délassements* of your long courtship ought to have inclined you to a better appreciation of the sex. Tell me about Miss Clifford. We have brought her some wonderful lace flounces. When do you set out to meet her, never to part again?"

"To-night," returned Maurice: "I must reach Oaklands to-morrow evening. What can I tell you about Rosamond, Pansy? She is anxious to meet you: I hope you may be good friends."

"Don't dream of it," said Violet tartly. "I no longer go in for friendships of any description. Besides, we should never suit each other. I hear she is very cold and stately. Excuse my frankness, Maurice, if I say that I wonder at your choice: I fancied such a glacier as yourself would have preferred something warm and sunshiny."

"The only chance of self-preservation for a glacier is to stay among snow-covered peaks, my dear Pansy."

She looked at him steadily. "Of course you have met Miss Clairmont," she murmured drowsily.

"Of course I have met Miss Clairmont."

"How did you like her?"

"What a woman's question! I suppose you expect me to say she is 'nice'?"

"Under existing circumstances," observed Violet, blandly, "you could scarcely be expected to be absolutely candid. But you need not pretend that you fail to admire her."

"I admire her immensely."

"She is remarkably beautiful. I hear that all American women are beautiful, but I do not believe she is surpassed by many of your countrywomen."

"Without depreciating my countrywomen's claims to beauty, I must say I think their style a little less perfect than Miss Clairmont's. There is something about her face that I have rarely seen outside of a painter's canvas: there is something ideal about her."

"Then," pursued Violet, watching her cousin closely, "she has infinite tact and is remarkably clever."

"Is she clever? That had not once occurred to me. She is certainly little of a talker."

"She makes you talk, is it not?"

Maurice laughed. "Yes," he exclaimed, "I confess I have found a good deal to say to her."

"Has she sung to you?"

"Many times."

"Few voices equal hers."

"Very few," said Maurice absently; "at least it is to be hoped there are few voices like hers, for I think with many such sirens singing on the earth, men would go to perdition generally, and the world's work would never be done."

"Oh, you too are under her spell," cried Violet contemptuously.

"Oh no," laughed Maurice. "Frank is bewitched, not I. There she comes now;" and Violet, turning, saw Felise alighting from a pony-carriage. Frank sprang down the drive, and led her to the summer-house, where the party was still loitering. The gentlemen drew back and watched the ladies embrace, their light draperies melting into each other's like clouds while they looked into each other's faces and bestowed those soft,

zephyry cheek-caresses women call kisses.

Violet and Felise remained standing together, their tall slender figures thrown into delightful contrast. Felise's guileless baby-smile irradiated love and sunshine. Violet's face was all fire and pride: some Trastavernian ancestor had bequeathed her a stately pose of head and throat, and all the passion of Southern races was in her eyes; the haughtiness of sovereign and cruel generations showed in her mien, and nothing saved her face from arrogance but the charm of her smile, which was sunny, open, captivating, like a burst of sunshine from behind a cloud.

Frank folded his arms and tried to look pleased while the ladies exchanged these little social amenities, but in his heart he was conscious of an inhospitable wish that these relations were still across the summer seas, for he perceived at once that they were fond of petting Miss Clairmont. He seemed to see a prospect that the exquisite joy of his summer days was to be diluted into a waste of infinite twaddle. He watched them with a frigid eye. Pretty women quiver and plume themselves like birds, and group like flowers; and even if they do not love each other, it seems to hapless man as if they did, and as if they loved nothing else. Man grows giddy as he regards their demonstrations: men do not affect the same intimacy among themselves, do not caress and cling to each other, cooing little insipidities of delight into each other's ears. Accordingly, such kisses and pet phrases and embraces induce temporary self-disgust and despair in the masculine mind. Alone, a woman is assailable, but in a phalanx she is terrible.

"Is it not droll that we should all meet here?" said Mrs. Meredith as she sat down and smoothed her ruffled plumage like a canary-bird. "The ends of the earth have been ransacked and the affinities brought together."

"I thought I had left almost all my friends behind me in the Old World," said Felise, deigning finally to accept the garden-chair Frank had brought to

her, "but if they follow me I have nothing to regret."

"I have been expecting a depopulation of the kingdom," observed Mrs. Meredith, who always carried about a little pebble to fling at the person she loved best, and, not wishing to be too particular, now flung it at once; "but the flying feet of your votaries, Felise, have been clogged by circumstances beyond their control. Lord Palliser has been crippled with the gout; Hubert has had his debts paid on condition that he does not cross the Atlantic; and Ralph Wylde has given his attention to ameliorating the condition of his tenants, and invented a new chimney and boiler for his cottages."

"Thank you very much," returned Felise with a magnificent air; "and now tell me about the rest of my friends: how are Miss Wylde and Georgy?"

"Laura has gone in for intellect this season, and has receptions for all the long-haired people. Nobody has a claim upon her sympathies unless he has written a book which nobody will buy, discovered a planet, found a primeval man, or believes in something naughty and heterodox. Well-bred, comfortable church people have no chance with her at all. I was anxious to go, for I thought the conversation of these monsters must be so spirituel, but dear Laura does not seem fond of me this year. As for Georgy, she is going to marry the curate down at Dudley, and they are putting wax candles on the altar, flowers in the font and training the ploughboys to sing responses through their noses."

"Every one seems well occupied," remarked Felise. "How far away from home you are! and how do you like your first glimpses of America?"

"I confess myself a little disappointed. Nobody has yet committed any of those enormities which we attribute to 'those dreadful Americans.' However, I trust I shall be more fortunate before I go home. I have a great many droll stories to tell my friends for which I should like to have some shadow of a foundation."

"Oh, I dare say you will see some trespass upon polite rules which will give you an opportunity for a shudder," said Miss

Clairmont; "so you can at once generalize your experience and declare that all Americans commit the same fault habitually. I used to despair when I lived in England of finding any person well enough informed to understand the enormous extent of the United States, and the possibility that manners and customs among the pioneers and in the frontier settlements did not govern the cultivated classes."

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Meredith. "At home we all thank God that we know nothing whatever about America. Ignorance on most points is considered a crime in good society, but we pride ourselves that this country and its inhabitants are altogether beyond our comprehension."

"I intend to admire America and its institutions," said Violet, yawning. "I am tired of the old, and intend to worship the rising sun."

"Ah, you'll grow wiser, my child," rejoined her mother. "I have wasted enthusiasm upon rising suns whose days have ended in fog and drizzle, and I now abide by the old régime. Yes, I intend to look down on America."

"We do not mind being looked down upon by the English," retorted Felise, laughing, "for everybody knows that the insular mind regards with contempt all nations too large to live on your little island."

"Ah, petite! so you set up for an American? Who has nationalized you?"

"But I was born here, and my French blood gives me an ardent love of liberty; and where else is liberty to be found?"

"Why do people rave about liberty?" mused Mrs. Meredith. "I don't know what they mean. The French idea of liberty is to build barricades and guillotine everybody whom they feel to be better than themselves. At home our radicals want to pay no taxes and do nothing for the support of the royal family.—What is liberty in America, Maurice?"

Maurice shrugged his shoulders, laughed, and looked at Miss Clairmont, to whom his aunt repeated her interrogation.

"You must read the Declaration of Independence," rejoined Felise slyly.

"What is the Declaration of Independence?"

"Alas! it would be so uncivil to tell you!"

"Maurice will say nothing," put in Violet. "I suppose he is like Fox, 'so used to the applause of the House of Commons he has no wish for that of a private company: used to throw dice for a thousand pounds, he does not care to do it for sixpence.' But I have heard that it was a characteristic of Americans to wave their stars and stripes on the least opportunity, and to make orations in private life."

"Yes," said Maurice, "I too have heard that when Henry Clay was on a journey through the West he stopped all night at an inn, 'the world forgetting,' and, he hoped, 'by the world forgot;' but his host discovered the name of his guest, and next morning, when the statesman asked for his bill, the landlord begged that instead of making it a paltry affair of dollars and cents, he would requite their hospitality by making him and his wife a little speech."

"Who was Henry Clay?"

"No common clay. — Here comes Morton."

Mrs. Meredith turned, put her glass to her eye and regarded the new-comer with a supercilious British stare. Morton was advancing from the grove of willows at the foot of the ground with a book in his hand and an umbrella over his head. He remarked quietly to Frank that he was afraid of this dazzling American sunshine, but it is to be feared there was too hot a fire in his veins at the thought of seeing Violet for him to feel the fiercest noontide blaze. He had been in the woods on the hill, he went on to tell Frank, and the flickering light in the copsewood coolness had been so much more attractive to him than his book that he had idled away the entire morning.

By this time Mrs. Meredith had looked at him from head to foot, decided that he was sufficiently good form even for her fastidious taste, and probably worth cultivating. Accordingly, she held out a little jeweled hand. "How d'ye do, Mr. Morton?" said she, looking up in his

face demurely. "Is it not droll that we should come across each other here? How many centuries is it since I have seen you?"

"Looking at Mrs. Meredith," returned Morton, gravely regarding her, "persuades me it was yesterday I spoke to her last; otherwise I should say twelve years."

"Twelve years! I must have grown very old since then. Alas! I do not love to look in my glass any more, but twelve years ago it was my favorite occupation."

"I assure you there is no need of your imitating Laïs for thirty years yet."

"Who is Laïs? I know nothing about her."

"She was a beautiful woman, and when she grew old she gave her mirror to Venus, for she could not bear to look at herself in it."

"What a pretty story! Mr. Morton, I am delighted to see you. I always liked you, you know, for you were always telling me something different from the twaddle I have heard all my life. We were just speaking about our impressions of America. You must like it here. One man is as good as another in America, they tell me. Now go and speak to my daughter. Do you remember her all these years?"

Morton turned at last, and dared to look at Miss Meredith. Did he remember her? He was sure of nothing for a few seconds, and felt a dazed sense of insecurity in his position. The long colonnades of trees beyond him seemed to tower higher and higher into the sky, and there was a sound in his ears as of innumerable song-birds in unison. When he had last seen her face to face he had held her in his arms defying Fate, and he could have sworn then that not a throb of his heart but was answered by hers. Had she not tearfully returned his long gaze, given him back his kisses, promised to be faithful to him through life and through death? She had been a child then, with a child's rosy contours of cheek and throat, a full babyish figure, and ways, it must be said, a little hoydenish. She had changed, but not out of his remembrance. She

turned at the sound of her mother's words, and he advanced toward her with some indistinguishable murmur of words about being glad to meet Miss Meredith.

"I recollect you very well, Mr. Morton," she said with an easy voice and smile, then as carelessly raised her eyes to his; but she met the gleam in his with enough emotion to send the color to her temples. For one moment he had his triumph in her recognition of their mutual past, then she had shaken off the momentary embarrassment. "How long it is since I have seen you!" she went on, toying with the roses in her belt. "Twelve years? Then I was sixteen, now I am twenty-eight. What a difference!"

"Precisely," answered Morton smiling—"what a difference!"

"I was a child then," resumed Violet, "and liked bread-and-butter and bonbons. I had one passion, a strong one, and it was for cream tarts."

"And now you no longer care for cream tarts?" inquired Morton with an air of solicitude.

"Oh dear! no: I find them very insipid. In fact, I no longer have a passion for anything."

"I never liked cream tarts," he replied with an inscrutable smile, "but I once had a passion for beauty and truth, and an unsatisfied craving for the apples of Hesperides. Now-a-days, I am so old and lazy I would not cross the narrowest sea to pick them all."

"But then you have had so many golden apples without lifting your hand to the branches! We all know of your literary successes, Mr. Morton."

He bowed with a deprecating air, and passed on to speak to Miss Clairmont, but did not succeed in gaining her attention, for Felise was listening to Maurice, who was giving her an outline of his projected wedding-journey. She was, besides, a little dull to-day, perhaps because the wedding was to take everybody away from Saintford for a time. Morton accordingly went back to Mrs. Meredith, who made a place for him beside her on the garden-bench, and began to prattle to him in her pretty scrappy way, trying at first to flatter him, in the

way women who know the world declare to be most irresistible to men, by talking to him about himself. But he seemed so bored that she took a wider field and gave him the last London gossip, told about a peer's new book, alluded to the ministerial crisis and the races. "Did you congratulate Violet upon her engagement?" she inquired at last with sly malice.

Morton flushed. "I did not presume," he returned quietly. "Do you allow it to be talked about?"

"Talked about? Why not? What is the use of unexampled good luck unless it is talked about? I assure you this engagement is well worth talking about. It is the prettiest thing of the season—so particularly suitable in every way that I am quite satisfied with the match, although I always intended Pansy should marry a title. The Wilmots are *so* well off! There is no end of ready money, besides the two estates. The settlements are in progress, and I may whisper to you as an old friend that the provision for Violet is princely—*absolutely princely*. I wish you could see the diamonds she is to have reset for her. Really, I never knew anything to equal Violet's prospects of happiness."

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven," murmured Morton in his sweetest way.

"Oh no: I really don't think that. Society isn't heaven, and what is the use of putting on airs as if it were? I am the best of Christians, but I never mix up matters. I live in a world where wealth and position make all the difference in one's conception between vice and virtue. So, not to pretend to be better than my neighbors, I adore position and wealth, and consider all people who possess neither poor creatures."

Morton laughed. "Did you ever hear of Douglas Jerrold, dear Mrs. Meredith?" said he. "He had a little dog who followed him about, and one day a lady stopped in the street and stared at the animal, ejaculating, 'What an ugly little beast!' 'Madame,' returned Jerrold, bowing, 'I quite agree with you; still, I wonder what, on his side, he is thinking of us at this moment?'"

"Oh, I catch your moral," rejoined

Mrs. Meredith. "I know there are plenty of sharp things to say about the lucky people of the world; and I know that wealth and precedence are not given to the best and wisest of men and women after a competitive examination. Still, abuse them as you please, what you would best like would be a taste of their cakes and ale. You remind me of a *bon mot* of one of those fair, frail women at the regent's court in France. She used to wear two bracelets, each containing a portrait, one of Charles Edward the Pretender, the other a picture of our Blessed Lord. When people used to ask her what possible connection there could be between the two, she would reply, 'Their kingdoms are not of this world.' So with you clever people, who believe that you are laughing at and despising temporalities and aspiring toward something better, 'your kingdoms are not of this world.'"

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#### CHAPTER VI.

MORTON had, however, some reason before he slept for believing that some of the rewards he most longed for awaited him in the kingdoms of this world. Maurice having started for Oaklands toward evening, Morton took his place at dinner at the cottage. Afterward, Mrs. Meredith and Frank sat together in the parlor discussing everything in heaven and earth which touched their individual interests, while Morton followed Violet to the side-piazza and stood beside her while she looked at the sunset absorbed in her own thoughts. It was a delicious evening. The western sky had been brilliant with masses of rose and crimson clouds, until now they had moved onward to the east, and as the sunset light faded the trees gloomed together against a background of primrose sky, where the evening star shone faintly.

Miss Meredith rarely hesitated to avail herself of unlimited freedom from small social duties, and just now, as it was her pleasure to be silent, she allowed the twilight to pass like the sunset, and still sat absorbed in thought, reverie or dreams

when the moonlight crept over the lawn. She was, to tell the truth, recalling the circumstances of her old acquaintance with Morton. Who knows how that early gush of feeling seemed to her now after so many ardent dreams, such bitter disappointments, such triflings with feelings which ought to have been sacred to her? There was at least nothing to dread when she brought back that childish past and looked it in the face. Let the affair have been as foolish as it might, there was sweetness in its folly: that it had been abruptly ended was the fault of relentless circumstances. Other men had knelt to her, and she had seemed to listen to them, beguiling their love of all its eloquence: more than that, she had sometimes welcomed it with smiles and caresses, had fooled them almost to the top of their bent, then turned her back upon them and beckoned another to her feet. These men, whom she had so shamefully tricked, she hated to meet when time had cooled them, but Morton could reproach her with nothing. He had aspired beyond his sphere in loving her, but she had met him halfway and forgiven his presumption: he could only blame the pride of Mrs. Meredith and the artificial distinctions of a society he had long declared that he despised. He had loved her in her youth, and no woman ever forgets her first lover: the only roses in her garden that she counts absolutely fair and sweet are those which are first picked, and for those who come afterward to find beautiful blossoms she has a smile and a sigh. Yes, she was inclined to allow herself a full reminiscence of the summer at Meredith Grange twelve years before, since meeting Morton face to face again had not degraded the picturesque interest of her first love-affair. When she did break the silence she knew well enough how to fascinate and perplex him, and arouse his imagination concerning her feelings toward him. If she laughed at him a little in her heart, it was only that she had accustomed herself to laugh at any one who was thoroughly in earnest: she was skeptical, if not by temperament, by experience and education, and the idea which his

words and manner conveyed, that he had been faithful to his early love for her, piqued her curiosity. She was well used to men of a certain sort of cleverness who could pretend to a devotion strong enough to penetrate the coldest consciousness, but to one like Morton, who said little, yet seemed to feel so much in meeting her again, she was quite unaccustomed.

In fact, when Harry Morton awoke next morning he felt as if he had gone to bed intoxicated body and soul. He had talked with Violet on the piazza for an hour; then they had listened while Frank Layton sang all his old songs to his aunt; afterward they had entered the parlors and spent the evening after the easy fashion of the house, Luigi dispensing tea and iced claret, while Mrs. Meredith and Violet talked in their wildest way, lending a charm to gossip and a grace to folly. There was no one memory which Morton could decide had been the spark to fire his soul, but everything seemed to have conspired to make him remember things it would have been wiser for him to forget, and to forget things it would have been wiser to remember.

He awoke dispirited and hopeless. It would have been better, he told himself again and again, if he and Violet had not been alone together—if they had not for ten minutes strolled down the garden-path arm in arm. The scene was not new: must not she too have remembered summer nights in the gardens at the Grange twelve years ago, when the late sun was setting and the sleepy governess dozed in the summer-house, and the tutor and his favorite pupil wandered up and down the shrubberies and flower-bordered paths, conscious perhaps of the placid beauty of the skies, but more conscious of the warm tingling pleasure of youth and happiness and love? Impossible that she should have forgotten what he remembered so well. Whatever influences might have asserted their supremacy over her since, she could never be so young again, nor so hopeful nor so happy. Memory, otherwise colorless to Morton, had concentrated itself upon

that time, and all the capabilities of his emotional nature, diffused in other men's lives over a dozen experiences, had expended themselves upon his one love-affair: in all the years passed since he had needed but one slight token, a perfume, a melody, a strain of love-poetry, to point with a luminous ray to that source of all his light, and make his heart throbbingly renew all its old pulsations.

As soon as he had been dismissed from his position of tutor in the family he had set to work to gain money and reputation. He had not told himself that they would win Violet for him, but he was angry with himself that he had had so little to offer her that he felt like a house-breaker when Mrs. Meredith said to him, "And what did you expect to support my daughter upon, Mr. Morton, if all your pretty schemes were carried out and you had run away with her?" So, with a feverish desire to overcome in some measure this inequality of position, he had worked his hardest against humiliations and discouragements. If he had possessed capital or influence, a literary life would have been far from his choice, because he wanted to make a fortune in a hurry, and as well because his own individuality was sacred to him, and he hated to disclose the secrets of his heart and mind, as he should if he wrote honestly, while he loathed the dishonesty of invention. But he had no career before him except literature, and here, to his own surprise almost, he found success: not at first, but after long, patient and continuous effort. His gains were not princely, but he soon attained some portion of his wish for independence, and saw the way to further prosperity. If he had really put the winning of Miss Meredith as the motive of his ambition, how could he fail? Had he known, however, the history of these years for her, spent by him in arduous toil, all his honest endeavor, his strenuous endurance, patience, courage and fidelity, must have appeared to him to be wasted.

He heard about her occasionally—of her beauty and success and admirers; of her jilting that man, and being jilted by

this one in return. He had no faith in gossip, and his mind dwelt upon but one phase of these rumors—that, in spite of so many chances, she did not marry. What could it mean, he asked himself again and again, except that she was true to her first love? And in his hopeful moments he dreamed of standing beside her, of telling her of his long service in the hope of winning her. He had not degraded his memory of her by any lesser passions, and could say,

Oh, a kiss  
Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!  
Now, by the jealous queen of heaven, that kiss  
I carried from thee, dear, and my true lip  
Hath virgin'd it e'er since.

But now he had seen her, and in seeing her had been reminded over and over again that she was not his to win, but the promised bride of another. Last night he had forgotten it, but to-day it was the first thought he encountered, and he left his bed and began the labors of the day sadly disenchanted. He had made himself no chivalrous creed, but he knew it was not a part for an honorable man to play, that of injuring the cause of a rival.

He laughed bitterly to himself at his visions of happiness. What had led him to imagine that he could be happy? Had not every experience of life taught him not to hold out his hand, lest instead of gaining bread he should be cut by a sharp stone? He felt master of himself again, and decided that he could endure his misery, and told himself that his rôle in life must be that of a stoic, all the time that he was rapidly packing his boxes and deciding to leave Saintford at noon. He took some satisfaction even in thrusting his things pell-mell into his trunk, and then ramming them down with a walking-stick that he might make more room: some hours afterward, when he took out his dress-clothes preparatory to investing himself in them and dining with Frank Layton and the Merediths, he wished, with those unavailing regrets which characterize most of us in reviewing our day's proceedings, that he had not wrinkled them so unalterably.

In fact, packing one's clothes, even cording one's luggage, is a mere initia-

tory step to going away. Morton decided that bare civility constrained him to make farewell visits, and the church-clock was only striking eleven when he rang at the door of Frank's cottage, and on entering made his way to the library, where his friend was writing letters. He was alone, no ladies were visible, and Frank had a grave face and a sad demeanor, which presaged disaster. "Sit down," said he, pushing a chair to Morton. "Did you ever hear such dreadful news?"

"Dreadful news?" repeated Morton, bewildered.

"Has nobody told you? Hubert Clifford was drowned last night at half-past seven. You must know whom I mean—the brother of Maurice's engaged wife." Morton made some vague but proper ejaculation, and Frank went hurriedly on, giving his news: "The morning papers have it, and half a dozen despatches have come from Oaklands. The house was full of visitors, you know, and poor Bert was rowing three or four girls on the river last night, and left the boat to climb the rocks for some flowers. His foot slipped and he fell into the water, striking his head against the lower ledge. He was quite dead when they picked him up."

"The death will postpone the marriage, I presume," said Morton abstractedly.

"I fear it will," returned Frank sadly. "It is the third time something has occurred to put it off. Maurice will be terribly cut up. He was strongly attached to poor Bert, who was the best fellow in the world. I shall ask you to find my aunt, Morton: I have some letters to write, and must go up and tell Miss Clairmont our bad news. We have been discussing our plans, for everything is upset. You know we were to start on Monday for Oaklands; the wedding was to come off on Wednesday; we were to remain a week, and then join Maurice and his wife and travel with them for a time, and return here together."

"What do you think of doing now?"

"The ladies are so overcome by the heat they dislike the idea of travel, and

I have no doubt but Maurice will be back shortly. Altogether, I am in favor of remaining here and putting off our journey until September."

"So Mrs. Meredith and her daughter will remain in Saintford?" observed Morton in a dreamy sort of way. Days like yesterday, then, were to go on indefinitely, blissful as blue skies, warm airs and sweet ruinous idleness could make them! It required his strongest resolution to stop his mental balancing of expediencies and plausibilities, and announce his approaching departure to his friend, who received the news with that unconcern which most of us have the luck to see in others when we are conscious of bravely managing the supreme temptation of our lives, and long for a little aid or sympathy.

Yet Frank realized very well the nature of Morton's struggle respecting Violet, and thought the better of him for his discretion in going away from Saintford at once. But he was too afraid of being intrusive to express his feelings; so with a curt farewell he shook hands with his visitor, and, parting the curtains, pointed out the figure of Miss Meredith on the lawn, and bade him go and make his adieux to her as she sat reading beneath the willows. Morton obeyed him, making his way to her slowly across the lawn and garden. He tried to feel that he was quite cool and collected, and well able to read any problem that the coquetry of a woman might offer him for solution; but, on the contrary, he was excited beyond any capacity for calm decision.

Violet sat beneath the willows, their delicate sprays making a setting for her face as she drew the light branches down, playing with them involuntarily as she read. She was dressed in thin white, the lace at the neck clasped by a sapphire, and her perfect feet in blue silk slippers rested on the little King Charles, who sulked at the burden she forced him to bear. She looked up at Morton so cool and self-possessed that her indifference, coming in contact with his heroic passion, almost enraged him.

"Good-morning," said she. "Is it not too warm to live?"

"Yes: this seems terribly warm for an Englishwoman, who thinks at home the heat is scorching if the glass stands at eighty."

"I am reading your last novel," she remarked, nodding and smiling. "I found it in Frank's bookcase an hour ago."

"Don't waste any time on it: it won't repay you."

"Don't undeceive me. I think it so clever. I have been wondering how you know so much about love. Is it subjective or objective knowledge?"

Morton's dark face grew darker. He did not answer her, and she went on reading voraciously.

"Where in the world did you get your ideas about love?" she demanded again presently, finishing her chapter.

"Entirely from books," he returned coolly. "I looked out its definition in the dictionary, and afterward read *Jane Eyre*."

She yawned and closed her book. "I suppose you have heard the shocking news about Miss Clifford's brother," said she. "The wedding is off for the present, I presume. Is not Maurice lucky to marry such a tremendous heiress as his bride is turning out to be? She is the only child now."

"Well, certainly, regarded from that point of view, it is a good thing to get rid of one's relations. At first it foolishly occurred to me that Miss Clifford was to be pitied."

"Oh, I am not altogether heartless. I merely regarded the matter from a standpoint of absolute disinterestedness. But have you heard that we are to stay here until the heat of the season has passed? We expect Maurice to come back: will it not be delightful?"

"I trust so."

His tone was peculiar, and Violet looked at him sharply.

"I am going up to spend the morning with Miss Clairmont," said she, making a motion to rise. "The carriage was ordered at twelve: you can come with me."

"No," returned Morton, sitting down beside her and speaking entreatingly, "do not go away yet. This is my last

morning in Saintford: I shall never again be alone with you. Give an hour to me."

"But why are you leaving Saintford?"

"Because it is better for me to go."

"Say that you are leaving the place because we came. That is the truth of the matter."

"I go away because it is right for me to go," he answered again, his eyes meeting hers. "You had better not try to keep me here," he added with a bitter laugh as he saw entreaty in her face. "I am not likely to be wise or prudent if I stay."

"But it is absurd for you to think of going," said Violet in a quick, earnest way. "It was pleasant for me to find my old friend here. Pleasures rarely come to me now-a-days. Why must you spoil this for me?"

"God knows," cried Morton, "pleasures are not in my way. It is because seeing you is such supreme pleasure that I am obliged to renounce it. It is hard discipline even for me, who am used to hard discipline. I can swear that, Miss Meredith."

"I do not believe in hard discipline," she rejoined, smiling at him lazily. "You may gain the kingdom of heaven by it, but you don't know that for certain, while you are sure of losing the kingdom of earth. I will not have you go away," she went on, looking at him with a glance too dallying and dangerous for him to meet coolly—" *I will not have it, I say.*"

They were silent, but she kept her eyes upon him still, and he continued to stare dumbly into her face. She was holding a branch of the drooping willow in her fingers, and struck him lightly with it across the back of his hand. "Come," said she, springing up and starting forward, "I will change my dress and you shall go with me to Miss Clairmont's. She will sing to us. Come," she cried again, standing on the terrace a little above him and waving her hand.

He advanced with a stride and stood beside her. "I will follow you anywhere," he said with strong emotion, "if, after what I tell you, you bid me 'Come.' I was going away because—

because I love you so dearly still that to see you, knowing all the time I could be nothing to you, would drive me mad. Let me stay with a chance of your being to me what you promised to be once, and I will stay. But if you mean to marry that boy—if you can give me nothing of what I want—for God's sake, Violet, let me go—the sooner the better."

She listened with a drooping, half-averted face, without change either of features or color. Then came a brief silence, which Morton's heart-beats measured heavily. At last she moved slowly along the terrace and pulled a rose and myrtle from a vase. "Put that in your buttonhole," she said, stealing a little glance at his grim face, and smiling and dimpling. "You are going to see La Belle Clairmont, and you must deck yourself accordingly. I am so glad there is no need of your going away!"

## CHAPTER VII.

FRANK and his guests were reading their papers and letters at breakfast one warm morning a fortnight later when Maurice descended the stairs with his swift, half-boyish bound, entered the room, shook hands with Frank, kissed his aunt, and, extending two fingers to Violet, ordered Luigi to bring him some iced coffee. These proceedings, although not irregular in themselves, were somewhat disconcerting to his family, who believed him to be some hundreds of miles away.

Frank stared at him helplessly. "My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I know the first duty required of a host is not to make himself a bore, yet, try to suppress my curiosity as I may, I can't help wondering how the deuce you got here."

"By the last train from New York last night," returned Maurice.—"Luigi, some more ice."

"Where did you sleep?"

"Here, in my most comfortable bachelor bedroom."

"I'll swear you weren't here at twelve o'clock," said Frank, laughing, "and

now you got in after that is a mystery to me."

"Allow me to explain," observed Maurice with bland hauteur. "I came on from Oaklands with Mr. Clifford and Rosamond yesterday: they left by the night-boat for Newport. I took the eight o'clock express, which broke down at Norwalk, and we did not reach Bridgeford until half-past twelve."

"Did you get a carriage there?"

"Not one was to be procured."

"How did you reach Saintford?"

"I walked."

"What did you do with your luggage?"

"My secretary, Perkins, is with me. I sent him to a hotel in Bridgeford with my traps."

"I am so sorry!" cried Frank in dismay. "I might so easily have sent for you had I but known. Then to think after your four-mile tramp of your having no supper!"

"Oh, but I did, though. Ask Luigi if I slept fasting."

"Ah, Luigi is in the plot? He let you in?"

"Luigi was on the back lawn with a guitar," said Maurice with a chuckle at the remembrance of the serenade he had interrupted. "He admitted me of course. Depend upon it, Frank, your cook believes in burglars this morning. I devoured everything in the larder. It was not a time for unlimited fastidiousness: I was too hungry to hesitate before anything that could be eaten."

"Tell us what you ate," whispered Mrs. Meredith with a morbid curiosity, as if she expected details of a cannibalistic feast.

"A dish of lobster-salad," recounted Maurice gravely, "evidently untouched from your dinner; a huge *pâté*; some strawberries, with a quart or more of cream; several pounds, I should suppose, of rich fruit-cake. Unsatisfied with this, I sent Luigi foraging again, and he found me some crackers, a bottle of salad-dressing, and three boxes of sardines."

"And you ate them, salad-dressing and all?"

"Everything, except the tin boxes and the glass bottle."

"Of course you never closed your eyes afterward."

"On the contrary, I slept like a cherub, my dear aunt."

"But how do you feel this morning?" she inquired with ghastly concern.

"Rather grim and ogreish, but don't blame my supper for that, as I was still worse yesterday."

"Why on earth did you not wake me up?" inquired Frank, deeply injured. "There was not a drop of wine out. All the keys were in my room."

"I wanted no wine, but I did feel a desire to see you, so I opened your door as I stole up to bed, and stood over you with a candle a full quarter of an hour."

"A new Cupid and Psyche," remarked Violet, looking up from her letters. "I wish I could have seen you."

"Frank was quite a pretty picture, but I assure you I lent no poetry to the scene. I was a perfect blackamoor after my tramp through the dust. Slumber gives you back your baby-face, Frank: I mistrusted what you were dreaming about."

"I wish I had waked up," said Frank, laughing. "I am not used to the honor of having my beauty-sleep watched by Psyches of any sex. If you had left a patch of wax on my pillow, I might have had a pleasant hour of mystery this morning."

"And how," inquired Violet deliberately, "is the fair Rosamond, cousin Maurice? A sort of mourning bride isn't she, by the way?"

"Quite well," returned Maurice briefly. "She requested me to give you these notes." And he produced from his pocket-book three envelopes, all directed in a large slanting hand and heavily bordered with black.

"She says nothing about your plans," remarked Mrs. Meredith, looking up at her nephew from the perusal of hers. "When shall you be married now?"

"I have no idea. I expect to serve Jacob's time."

"I could not express to you by letter, Maurice, how grieved were both Violet and I at the calamity which broke up your happy plans. It was so sad a thing for the Cliffords—then the consequent

disappointment to yourself. Let me offer—”

“I can bear calamities better than condolences,” cried Maurice, starting up. “It has been a most painful time to me. I cannot speak of it yet.—Frank, if you are through breakfast, suppose we take a turn in the garden?”

But not even Frank was to hear anything of his brother's grief for his friend or of his disappointment at his postponed wedding-day. Yet Maurice was full of talk, and, the other taking the cue, the two discussed most matters within the province of the newspapers as they passed to and fro on the graveled paths; and although such speech was barren enough, it was better for Maurice than either unconstrained confidence or silence. He was quite out of temper with Rosamond in particular and fate in general, and had he relieved himself of all his thoughts, he might have said something better left undefined even to his innermost consciousness. He was in the habit of making a decision as to the course he contemplated taking, and then adjusting circumstances to suit. Though not in the least in love, he had regarded the idea of wedlock with complacency, and had arranged for a summer of pleasant travel, its monotony varied by visits to political friends whose interest in him and his promised wife was both warm and familiar. What made the occasion peculiarly auspicious for his marriage was the fact of its being the “off year.” Nothing was doing in politics, and Maurice would have needed to give up no excitements in order to yield himself thoroughly to the *délassements* of early married life.

The death of young Clifford had altered all his plans. After the horror of the fresh catastrophe had changed into the life of quiet mourning—which, though taking up its broken existence sorrowfully, nevertheless does take up hopes and interests again—he had urged Rosamond to consent to a quiet marriage ceremony, after which, with Secretary Clifford, they would go to England and Scotland for the summer. But Miss Clifford was far too well aware of the necessities of strict etiquette at this juncture to yield any-

thing to the solicitations of a lover, no matter how eloquent. She declined to be married under six months—“by Christmas perhaps,” she added with downcast eyes as she arranged the folds of her fresh *crêpe*—and she had governed too long not to govern now, even though her will came in conflict with the wishes of the most inflexible of men. There had been, in truth, a strife for mastery between them, and the advantage had not lain with Maurice. Like most men, he enjoyed the conviction that he could judge much better for the woman who loved him than she could judge for herself, and now in his secret heart he was accusing her of that most unpardonable of feminine faults, coldness, since in this period of bitter sorrow she could not understand that her husband's arms would be her best refuge, her sweetest comfort. Besides, he instinctively divined why his claims were set aside. Miss Clifford had all her life been a very great lady, and her marriage must be a social event, and could not be performed hastily and privately like an ordinary marriage, since it was to crown a brilliant career with still greater *éclat*. Insensible himself to any fascination in the pageantry attending the ceremonial, which, man-like, he considered the unessential accompaniment of an event of vital importance, his pride was wounded that the woman whom he had chosen should not be willing to forget her little vanities when she was to marry *him*. So, altogether, Maurice was out of spirits, and in returning to Saintford was quite indisposed to allude freely to his change of plans. He had refused to accompany the Cliffords and Herberts to Newport, but had felt eager to reach his brother's, although he had not yet defined to himself the sort of comfort he expected to meet there.

The hall-clock struck the half hour, and Frank looked at his watch, which pointed to half-past eleven.

“Don't mind me,” said Maurice, pausing abruptly in their walk. “You want to go to Miss Clairmont's?”

“I had thought of going at this time.”

“If it is not too point-blank a question, how do you proceed in your wooing?”

Frank shrugged his shoulders. "I wish I knew myself, in order that I might tell you," he exclaimed with a slight grimace.

"As if a man could not tell in a thousand different ways if a woman loves him!"

Frank stared at his brother. "I wish," said he under his breath, "that I had a quarter of your audacity."

"My audacity!" said Maurice, laughing. "My audacity at its height never began to equal your beginnings. Go along with you!" and he waved his hand toward the gate. "I wish you would win her at once. I'm sure she must be fond of you, and I confess I quite long for such a sweet, dear, bewilderingly pretty sister-in-law. She is the sort of woman who rests me. I could sit and watch her all day, and feel highly entertained if she gave me a glance and smile and said yes or no at intervals. If you weren't bound there this morning, I believe I should intrude on her myself: she could draw this surly humor out of me."

"Poor old fellow!" said Frank warmly, throwing his arm over his brother's shoulder. "Go up there in my place. I'm so awfully sorry for you!"

"Stuff! Go along!" And Frank went.

Maurice watched him issue from the little side-gate, and for want of something better to think about his thoughts vagrantly followed him up the hill and into Mrs. Knight's pretty blue morning-room. He had been there so frequently before he left for Oaklands that it required scant effort of memory to bring the picture before him. It was a simple but pretty room, always fragrant with flowers and suggestive of Felise, from the music-strewn piano to the workbox on the table. She would be sitting in a certain low chair beside her aunt, and Frank would enter and wake her out of the sweet abstraction of her maiden dreams over her sewing. Frank was sure to do his part well there, Maurice said to himself. The influences of love-making generally mould a man into something less admirable than his best

words and ways, but Frank could keep his dignity even through such an ordeal of absurd homage and foolish duties. Foolish and absurd though they were, no doubt under right circumstances they might be very pleasant, very sweet.

It may have been from a wish to certify these impressions of Miss Clairmont after an absence of nearly three weeks that Maurice himself mounted the hill and entered Mr. Knight's gate four hours later. He found only Mr. Knight down stairs, but accepted with alacrity that gentleman's invitation to dinner; and Felise, after loitering over her toilette in the hope of being too late for hot soup on a summer's day, descended to find the meal tolerably advanced, and Maurice and her uncle talking politics vociferously over the fish. She listened dreamily as she ate her dinner, and felt like a little girl, for Maurice scarcely looked at her or spoke to her during the entire meal. Mrs. Knight put in a word now and then, asking the meaning of this or that, as women love to do when great subjects are under discussion, thus showing their capacity for grappling with and easily mastering what men call problems of state; demanding reasons, then failing to grope through processes of thought which compel the reasons; deciding *ex cathedrâ* on the right or wrong of the matter, and giving counsel from a higher stand-point than the stupid logical male creature has been able to arrive at from his knowledge of his own imperfections and his perception of the faultiness of mankind in general.

They all went on the piazza after dinner, and while they were taking coffee the pony-carriage came round and Zoo-Zoo ran down the steps and jumped into it, barking joyfully, while the man stood waiting at the horse's head holding the reins.

"Are you going to drive?" asked Maurice, going over to Felise and taking her coffee-cup from her hand.

"I did tell Thomas I should drive after dinner," she returned with a timid questioning look at her aunt, "but perhaps I shall not go, after all."

"Why not?" he demanded. "Because

I am here? I was hoping you would invite me to accompany you."

Felise looked at her aunt again.

"Suppose you drive Mr. Layton to the beach, Felise?" said Mrs. Knight tranquilly. "It is pleasant there at this time of day.—I am sure you will take good care of her," she added to Maurice with a smile, "especially if I tell you that she never did any gentleman such an honor before."

"I will take the best care of her," he returned gravely, and gathered up Miss Clairmont's hat, gloves and wrappings from the hands of Rachel, who appeared with them in the doorway. "I am the safest kind of an old gentleman. It is not in the least my own fault that I have not yet passed '*de l'allégo sautillant du célibataire au grave andante du père de famille.*'"

Felise put on her hat and gloves, was handed into the low carriage, and the two set off. She was a little embarrassed and altogether speechless, while Maurice, sitting beside her with Zoo-Zoo on his knees, was extremely amused by her silence, divining its reason at once. He tried to gain a glimpse of her face, but her wide-brimmed hat thwarted his efforts.

"Aren't you going to speak to me?" he asked finally. "You have not paid me the slightest attention to-day."

She looked up for a moment smiling and dimpling, but speech was farther off than ever when she met his smiling glance.

"Are you sorry I have come back again?"

"Oh no," she exclaimed heartily; then half ashamed of her dullness, and half feeling that it was inexcusable for her not to have told him before this of her sincere regret for the occasion of his coming back, she blushed so deeply that he could even see the flush upon the neck and arms that showed through the transparent muslin of her dress.

"I am afraid," said he, piqued, "that I have presumed too much in asking to accompany you?"

"Ah, do not think that," cried Felise in distress. "I am glad, very glad, to

have you come. I do not know why I am so dull to-day, but—but—"

"I wonder," said he with a short laugh, "if you are not a little afraid of me this afternoon? I knew that I felt like the traditional ogre who devours little girls, but I did not know that I looked like him." She laughed and blushed again. Maurice took the reins from her hands. "Let me drive you: I don't trust your horse's instinct, as you appear to do. I know the way to the beach. Don't ever be afraid of me again, my dear child. You have no need to be, I assure you. Do you know, I have been longing to see you all day? I envied Frank when he set off for his visit this morning."

"Why did you not come too?" she asked.

"I wanted you all to myself. I am the most selfish fellow. Besides, Frank is a youngster compared with me, and must have his innings. I took all mine years ago. Does he spend all his mornings with you? What do you find to talk about?"

"I forget."

"Which is a woman's formula for saying 'I don't choose to tell.' But what did you talk about this morning?"

"Nothing very wise. I was finishing a dress, and I teased your brother and Aunt Laura into giving me ideas for trimming it."

"Peaceful domestic scene!" said Maurice, looking at her with a keen glance. "Was it the dress you are wearing?"

"No, a blue muslin. We went shopping the other day in Bridgeford, and Mr. Frank Layton chose it for me."

"What a paradise it all seems!" exclaimed Maurice abruptly. "But I feel very unparadisical myself."

"I wish," murmured Felise, looking up into his suddenly-clouded face with her wistful glance—"I wish I dared say something to comfort you. I know that you have had a great grief, and that it resulted in a bitter disappointment for yourself."

"Yes, poor Bert was my dear friend. He was a good fellow, not of brilliant parts, but thoroughly honest and sincere. 'Tis a heavy blow to poor Clifford. Rosamond is the only child he has now."

"I wish," said Felise earnestly, "that your marriage need not have been delayed."

"So do I," he burst out impetuously. "It was a great mistake for Rosamond to put it off again. We have been engaged eighteen months, and no obstacle existed to our marriage in six weeks after I offered myself."

Maurice had apparently forgotten that he had never pressed Rosamond to set a limit to their engagement until some eight months after his proposal. He had, in fact, been so busy he had forgotten about it until that time.

"The months will soon pass," said Felise with tenderness in her voice: "Christmas will soon be here."

Her face was so pathetic and her tone so eloquent of commiseration that he could not restrain his amusement.

"How good you are!" he said warmly. "You seem actually to take my troubles to heart. I am afraid you look at my position through the rose-colored atmosphere of early youth, and regard my marriage prospects in a more romantic light than they deserve. Do you then consider me a desperate lover full of burning regrets for his paradise missed?" She was confused, and dropped her glance beneath his. "That side of life is over for me," he continued, his voice sinking almost to a whisper—"over, without my having availed myself of its enjoyments. I am not in love, so you must not waste that sweet pity upon me. Rosamond knows I am not in love. I have made no such professions. I am marrying into a connection which is delightful to me, as well as suitable to my position, but my dreams of wedded life have little to do with private happiness. It is the privilege of youth to have marriage an excuse for surrender to the sweet deliriums of love. I am too old. My future wife regards me as I do her. Of course, after a man is forty he cannot expect a woman to love him otherwise than soberly and sensibly. Can he, Miss Clairmont?"

"I do not know," exclaimed Felise, looking a little bewildered: "I have never thought about it."

"I should like to have you and Miss

Clifford know each other," he remarked with a mental glance ahead into the pleasant probabilities of their future intercourse as sisters-in-law. "Rosamond is rather cold and grand at first, but those who know her recognize that at heart she is a whole-souled, noble woman, with qualities far surpassing the average endowments of her sex. She is a trifle spoiled by society. She is now thirty-two, and ever since she was fifteen has been at the head of her father's house, both here and when he was minister abroad. There are few women of any position who have greater social experience. You would be sure to please her, and I really think you would grow to like her sincerely."

Felise smiled: she was ready to love Miss Clifford dearly. Maurice drove rapidly along the fern-bordered lane: it was a pleasant road, running between sunshiny fields of ripening grain, sloping away toward green-aisled forests on the one hand, which here and there parting disclosed glimpses of the sea between the tranquil line of woods. They soon reached the beach, a long strip of white shining sands extending for three miles along the placid Sound. Maurice threw the lines over the pony's back as he stood knee-deep in sand, and left him to nibble at the coarse grass that grew on the knoll above him; then, taking the afghan from the carriage, he flung it over his arm and led Felise down to the shore. Zoo-Zoo had leaped out the moment they came in sight of the water, and was now barking with exuberant delight at the waves that came crawling up to lick his feet.

"This is pleasant," observed Maurice when he had spread out the afghan on the sand and they had seated themselves upon it. "Let us stay here for hours. In fact, I never wish to go away."

Felise did not answer: she was looking across the sea, her head resting on her hands as she crossed her arms on her knees. "We all have some sympathies which are the result of our temperament and our experiences," he continued, stretching himself full length at her feet. "Mine are for the ocean: nothing

else in Nature perfectly soothes me. I hope when my time comes I may hear the billows breaking on the shore as I lie dying."

She started violently and looked at him, terrified for a moment; then reassured, apparently, with a half smile she went back to her old position and watched the white sails going up and down.

"What do you like best?" he asked, his eyes fixed vaguely on her face. "Tell me about yourself. Why are you so silent with me?"

"If," she said, looking timidly at him—"if I am silent with you, Mr. Layton, it is because you make me think about yourself: I am all the time thinking about you and wondering—"

She spoke with exquisite grace, but with the unconsciousness of a child. But it was well for her composure, perhaps, that she did not meet the kindling glance of the man beside her, nor see the glow on his cheek. For Maurice, who was not yet cool enough to hear with serenity that this beautiful, coy young creature thought frequently of him, turned his head away and asked her in an indifferent voice where she was born.

"We love best what we love first," said he. "It was in the south of France you spent your early life, I believe?"

"I was born here in Saintford," returned Felise—"in the very room where I sleep now. My father was attached to the French embassy at Washington, and my mother met him there, and they were married three months afterward. But he died in less than a year, and my grandpapa brought her back here to her old home, and in a little while I was born. She stayed here with me until I was more than six years old: then she took me to France to visit the Clairmonts, and she fell sick and died. Is it not strange? She is buried there among papa's people, while he sleeps here in the village churchyard with hers."

"You must have some recollection of your mother."

"Oh yes," said Felise, but she would say no more. She could never forget those weeks when her little feet took such weary pilgrimages up stairs and

down, in doors and out doors, anywhere and everywhere where she had once seen her mother in that crumbling old château, and her heart burst with the agony of the questless search.

"What became of you, poor little girl?" he asked.

"Old Mademoiselle de Clairmont—'la ma'amselle,' as we all called her—stayed on in the old château, and I lived with her. She had been my father's aunt, and was old, very old. Then Madame de Ferrars was often there, papa's sister: she was sad—she was always weeping because her husband did not love her and was cruel to her, and her three children were dead. They were good to me, but many of the servants seemed to love me better. In bright weather I was always out of doors when I had nothing to do, and when it was wet or cold old René used to go about the château with me, telling me stories about the faded, deserted rooms, the portraits, tapestries and embroideries. The Clairmonts were never very wonderful people, but they had lived their lives out there for many, many generations, and it seemed to me then that no lives had ever been richer in romance and pathos. Indeed, the pathos was the most, for however bright and gay their early life had been, it was all the same at the end: they grew old and died, and were forgotten except by poor old René."

She was silent for a moment, then continued with some enthusiasm: "You ask me what I like best. I think I never loved anything better than the old gardens at Clairmont. I long for them now in the cold, desolate winter. I have never seen such sunlight since as shone there: it was more golden, more peaceful, than this radiant sunlight here. I often find myself thinking of the forest there: it was full of beautiful mysteries to me, with its whisperings and sighings. Nearer the terrace the roses trailed over the white walls and hung from the urns, and even twined around the statues. Those statues used to awe me: some of them lay broken on the ground, others had been snapped in two by the coil of the heavy vines about them, but were still upheld in their places, and looked at me

with their sealed, beautiful dead faces as if they would not complain. Oh, those decayed old gardens, all unpruned and uncared-for, all overrun with vines and creepers, were very beautiful to me as a child. I have seen a great deal of the world since, but I have seen nothing that satisfied me so well as my old nook on the terrace, with the sun shining on the lizards, and the dial, and the roses; and all set to a sort of music by the moan of the trees."

"Who has the old château now?"

"I never asked: it is enough for me to remember that the Clairmonts no longer own it. I am quite the last of the name, and when old ma'amselle died I had to give up my kingdom for ever: the old château was sold to pay her debts. I have no money from my father's family—nor indeed very much from my mother," she added laughing. "I have only five hundred a year."

She was silent, regarding him frankly, then suddenly burst out laughing merrily. "I have told you everything now about myself," said she. "How could I talk so much?"

"Oh, go on, do go on!" he rejoined, quite in earnest. "I want to hear about everything you have ever done."

"There is nothing more to tell," she cried.

"Oh, but there is, though," he said with a sudden intensity of manner. "You too have stood on the threshold of marriage, and have yourself inflicted bitter disappointment."

She grew grave. "That was very different from yours," she returned with some effort. "Your engagement is not broken: its consummation is merely postponed."

"Do you mind my alluding to your engagement?" he asked, giving her a keen look. She shook her head, but grew a little reserved. "Few women could have refused Ralph," he pursued. "He is a thorough woman's ideal man—an Apollo indeed, well born, well bred, yet with none of the vices of his order: highly educated, yet as pious as an old woman, and goes to church on week-days. How could you fail to appreciate him?" Fe-

lise looked very disdainful. "As for myself," resumed Maurice, "I have a virtuous pride when I remember he is my first cousin. He has an ugly temper, but then he is so handsome. Don't you call him handsomer than either Frank or myself, Miss Clairmont?"

He had bared his head, and the south wind had ruffled his dark hair and blown it back from his temples: his eyes expressed both fire and mischief, and his smile was full of amusement. Felise laughed, but made no confessions or comparisons.

"I see," said Maurice, "that you will not commit yourself. But is not Wylde a finished gentleman?"

"Oh yes."

"Charitable and pious and orthodox as one of Miss Yonge's heroes?"

"He certainly is."

"Why, then, did you not love such a paragon?" She laughed. "Well, why not?" he demanded.

"How do you know I did not love him?"

"Had you loved him you would have married him, and I should not be sitting at your feet this happy afternoon."

"Perhaps so," returned Felise with rising color, "but you surprise me by seeming to consider love an essential for marriage, when you just told me—"

"Ah!" cried Maurice roused, "you are aggressive, mademoiselle. You think I am marrying without love, and that I urge such marriages on other men. You do not know me. I loved with all my heart once—with a passion that tears me when I think of it: my love was for my mother. You err, err much, if you believe me to be cold or heartless. I am neither; so much the reverse, in fact, that what alone saved me from drifting into a meaningless life was good hard work. I have two natures—one all feeling, the other all intellectual activity. I am not like other men: I cannot combine them. Enjoyment, calm content, renounced me years and years ago. I have filled my life with other interests than love-making. Rosamond understands this, and is satisfied with my views. I may despise the sweet fooleries of lovers, yet I shall make an excellent husband."

I dare say two years after I am married I shall love my wife as well as even your romantic heart could desire." Felise was looking at him in a way that perplexed him: her lips were smiling, but her eyes were sad. "I see you do not believe me," he went on more calmly, "but you don't quite know me yet. I admire Rosamond already, and be a woman what she may, an honorable man can yield no less to the wife who shares his existence than his sacredest confidence, his supremest tenderness."

But Felise had dropped her eyes and maintained a disconcerting silence.

"What are you thinking of?" he demanded sharply.

"I do not doubt," she faltered—"of course you understand yourself—I believe you."

"You are quite wrong, then," said Maurice, laughing, "for I do not understand myself. No man knows what he would be under the influence of any passion until he has felt it. I told you how I loved my mother, but that, after all, is different. I have never been in love. Tell me what it is like," he went on, coaxingly, "this being in love." And he continued to look at her with smiling audacity.

"Mr. Layton," she cried with a flash of color to her face, "I have never been in love."

"I knew it!" he exclaimed exultingly: "I knew you did not care for Ralph. Confess that his perfections bored you."

"I shall confess nothing of the sort."

"But you did not love him, I was certain of that. So you have never been in love? Neither have I. Let us go on. I never want to be in love: do you?"

But Felise said nothing.

He looked at her with sudden gravity. "But you will love: you will always be beloved, and not always in vain. A man's destiny is influenced by the love he gives—a woman's, by the love she accepts. So choose rightly when you choose."

"You do seem to believe in love, Mr. Layton."

"I know men, and I believe in it. The young believe that it is the privilege of

youth alone, but it is not so. I know old men, gray-headed, powerful, whose word settles affairs for nations, who are yet the slaves of women whose capricious wishes are higher laws than any they recognize on earth. I believe in such love as I believe in other calamities, but I think it may be avoided. There is a perilous fascination in its first advances, and great passions, easily mastered at the outset, are nurtured by yielding to the charm of pleasant hours until they grow too headstrong to be controlled. A man must hold himself in check. As for me—" But he remembered that he was talking to a girl who listened to him with some wonder, and he broke off abruptly.

The tide was coming in, and the monotonous roar of the surges filled up the pause. Zoo-Zoo had found some sea-monster, and, startled by its spasmodic movements, began barking vociferously. Felise sprang up and ran along the shore toward him. Maurice looked after her with an indulgent smile on his face as the wind blew back her bright hair and made her white draperies cling to her, disclosing the slender ankles and feet. She seemed to lean toward the breeze and drink it in; then she turned and ran around the point, with Zoo-Zoo after her, and vanished. Maurice watched the twinkling feet as long as they kept in sight, then he too jumped up and followed her with mighty strides. He soon overtook her, for she had paused in her race and seemed plunged in deep thought. The noise of the surf hindered her from hearing his approach, and believing herself quite unperceived, with an intent face she leaned down and with the tip of her parasol wrote something in the sand. Maurice was all the time looking over her shoulder, and smiled as he saw her trace the word *Love*.

"You do not need to write it there, child," said he, "for you have written it imperishably on many hearts."

She started and lost all self-command, looking at him with trembling lips and an air of terror.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed: "I have frightened you. I supposed you knew I was here, although you did not turn

round. I was horribly rude to watch you, but since it is such a secret I promise to tell nobody."

He stooped down and erased the magic word with his hand. "Not that when 'Love' really comes into your life it can be rubbed out like this," said he softly as he still knelt, looking up into her face. But she could not answer his smile, and murmured something inaudibly about its being time to go home; and they walked gravely back toward the carriage.

"Since this particular subject has been under discussion," said Maurice, after a long pause breaking the stiff silence, "I will tell you a story if you would like to hear it. Some twenty years ago I knew a very beautiful and singularly clever woman of thirty-five, and we played a very neat game of flirtation together. She was of course a married woman, and prided herself on her knowledge of men. When we parted she gave me a letter, remarking that it contained a story whose moral I must lay to heart. It ran thus: An Eastern prince was setting forth on his travels, and his father, the king, and his teacher, a venerable priest, laid their heads together to devise some plan to protect him from the snares of this wicked world. Accordingly, they selected a hundred wise books for him to carry. But the prince laughed, and asked how he could encumber himself with two camels' loads of musty folios. The priest selected the six which seemed fullest of profound lore. Still the prince refused, and even when the number of volumes was reduced to one, he declined it, since he could not force its wide covers into the knapsack which hung over his shoulders. The king and the priest were now in despair, but the priest went barefooted up the mountain and became a hermit, studying and praying, fasting. After an absence of many days he came down, and finding the prince just ready to leave the palace-gates, said to him solemnly, 'Since, O prince! you travel without caravan or slaves to bear written words of sacred wisdom, I have sought by much fasting and long prayerful vigils for the essence of all knowledge for the guidance of the unruly footsteps of the denizens of

the world. Carry this maxim, which has been disclosed to me, in your mind, and let it be imprinted on your heart. For this is the sum of all wisdom—the meaning of all commandment: Beware of woman, for in loving her thou shalt find in thyself weakness and wickedness, and liking temptation better than uprightness.'"

Felise laughed.

"I hope the prince was always wise," said she archly.

"Can you doubt it?"

"Your fascinating friend really believed love would be unlucky for you. You are wise to have avoided it;" and she turned her face toward him full of amusement.

"Avoided it?" he retorted. "I swear to you I never yet needed the lesson."

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#### CHAPTER VIII.

THEY drove home slowly. The shadows lay upon the grass as if they had gone to sleep; the birds twittered in the trees as they sought the densest greenery to cover their night's repose; the inland air seemed warm and sultry after the fresh breezes from the sea; and both Maurice and Miss Clairmont were weary and did not care to talk.

Felise was driving now, and when she reached the cottage she turned into the avenue at her companion's suggestion, that he might be dropped at the door. He laughed a little as he made the request, for it seemed both lazy and discourteous for him to proffer it. But he was all the time thinking it but fair that he should give his brother an opportunity of seeing Miss Clairmont, she was so exquisitely pretty as she leaned forward holding the reins. Maurice had always thought her beautiful, with a finer charm of graciousness and wit than other girls possessed, but not until to-day had he mastered the secret of the charm she might possess for the man who loved her. She was lovelier than others, but Maurice was familiar with a society which contained many pre-eminently beautiful women, and mere beauty moved him lit-

tle except to criticism and comparison. Felise's charm lay in the peculiar feminineness of her character and its manifestations, so he began to tell himself. She was, as somebody said of another fair woman, "*mieux femme que les autres femmes*," and stirred the wish in men to kneel before her and make her the object of some chivalrous endeavor. But exaggerated devotion of this stamp expresses itself differently in different social epochs, and Miss Clifford's engaged husband said and did nothing picturesque, although he mentally decided that his fair companion was quite worthy of even Frank's infatuation. He even told himself that unless he, Maurice Layton, possessed rare self-control and the capacity for mastering vagrant fancies, it might be better for even him not to sit too often beside Felise, as he sat now, free to watch in a luxurious mood the dark fringes of those rare eyes, the pale yet bloomy cheek, the contours of chin, throat and ear, with the golden hair flying back as they met the wind. But he did not hesitate to drink the enjoyment of the hour to the full, while he told himself that he regretted Frank had not been in his place. His brother had confessed to him that he enjoyed but rarely the chance of seeing Felise alone.

Mrs. Meredith and Frank were on the steps, and ran down to meet the pony-carriage. Felise was persuaded to stay to tea and allow the carriage to be driven home by a servant, to whom she gave a message for her aunt, requesting to be sent for at ten o'clock.

"Tell Mrs. Knight," said Frank, "that I shall myself take Miss Clairmont home at eleven o'clock.—You are the victim of circumstances," he added, leading his welcome guest into the house. "Give me your hat and gloves. No, you positively shall not go away to make yourself look more charming."

"But my hair is all blown about," pleaded Felise, adjusting her ribbons and necklace.—"I am sure," she added pathetically to Mrs. Meredith, "that I am very untidy."

"Nonsense!" returned that lady. "I dare say the gentlemen will not look at

you, and Violet and I quite prefer that you should appear as frightful as possible. Are you hungry? Violet is making tea herself. It is the only point where Frank's cook fails. Mr. Morton is cutting bread-and-butter."

"Werther fell in love with Charlotte when he saw her cutting bread-and-butter," observed Morton, resting a moment from his labors to make his bow to Miss Clairmont. "I never could imagine for what reason, but now I quite understand it was because she saved him the trouble."

"The scene is very pretty," said Maurice, looking through his hand with the air of a connoisseur at the group in the bay-window with Violet at the urn. "Quite a Dutch picture!"

"You prefer the French school, apparently," retorted Violet.

"Felise," cried Mrs. Meredith with her little tinkling laugh, "what have you done to put Maurice in a good humor? He was like a bear this morning, and his sorrow and disappointment were so contagious that we have all taken a gloomy view of life ever since."

"I assure you, Aunt Agnes," put in Maurice, "Miss Clairmont thought me very formidable when I first asked her to let me drive with her."

"Was he very, very cross, Felise?"

"On the contrary," he again interposed, "I was soft and confiding as a cherub. I confessed all my weaknesses to Miss Clairmont."

"Indeed! What were they?"

"I shall tell no one else. One Delilah is enough for a man."

"There might be safety in numbers. But it's far from proper, Maurice, to call Felise your Delilah."

"I agree with you, and call her nothing of the sort."

"What on earth did you say, then?"

"I made a remark on general principles that one Delilah was enough for a man."

"Oh!" Mrs. Meredith exclaimed, as if enlightened.—"Now, Felise, let me tell you our news. We have had a visitor since dinner—two visitors. One was a remarkably pretty woman in a toilette that filled me with envy. The other was

a mite of a creature—a sort of attendant sylph or sprite in vivid blue—an inch of skirts, voluminous embroideries, lace enough for a court-suit, and high blue kid boots."

"Mrs. Dury and her little girl?" asked Felise.

"Is she not a droll person?"

"Which? I think Mrs. Dury very magnificent, and as for Bel, she is an angel."

"Ask Mr. Morton if she is not an angel. The gentlemen were devoted to the fair widow of course, and heaped flattery and bonbons on the little girl. Mr. Morton asked the sweet infant which she preferred—himself or Frank. Miss Bel answered in her shrill voice, 'Oh, I like Mr. Layton best: he is not so ugly as you are.'"

"Mr. Morton did not mind, however," said Violet, "for the lovely widow turned her blue eyes upon him with a look which showed that she at least had a soul to be moved by his good looks."

"Frank," observed his aunt in a voice of solemn warning, "I hope you feel the perils of your position. A house like this, without a mistress, exposes a good-looking young man to peculiar liabilities. I think the widow had an intention when she declared her admiration of your tea-cups with dragon handles."

"Depend upon it," rejoined Frank, "I am quite safe where Mrs. Dury is concerned. But I tremble for Morton, as she makes no secret of her admiration for his giant intellect. It is hard upon me to see where her preference lies, but I will do nothing to injure the cause of my friend."

"Mrs. Dury is a very charming woman," said Morton.

"Isn't she?" observed Maurice. "And, like other widows, she saves a man a world of trouble. I consider widows a dispensation of Providence in behalf of shy men."

"Why so?" demanded Violet. "Is it easier to please a widow than an unmarried woman?"

"Most certainly it is. Few men but have a fear of the tender, innocent-eyed girls who come out every year, to whom

everything is a surprise, a sensation, and perhaps a shock. Now, with widows, tout va sans dire."

"I never knew before," said Violet, "why it was that men run after widows as they do. Now I perceive that their crowning fascination consists in an absence of 'shock.'"

"Precisely."

"Men never speak well of widows," pursued Violet, "yet let the most commonplace woman lose her husband and she becomes a social centre at once, and is certain to secure the best *parti*."

"My own theoretical convictions are in favor of the suttee," said Morton—"an admirable invention for preserving society from these dangers."

"Yes," observed Maurice, "the suttee is the proper thing, depend upon it. Every man at heart believes in it. But society tolerates widows, and hence,

Seen too oft, familiar with their face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

"I wish I were a widow," sighed Violet. "I might have been one. Do you remember old Mr. Macpherson, mamma? I refused him because he was ugly and deaf, and wore false teeth and a wig; but he was frightfully rich, and died of heart-disease six months after he proposed to me. Now, had I only known that when he came to know me well and love me he was sure to die, I would certainly have married him. In that case I might at present be a powerful rival to Mrs. Dury."

Frank had meantime taken a seat very close to Felise. "And where," he asked, "have you been taking my brother, Miss Clairmont?"

"To the beach," she answered.

"And very pleasant it was at the beach," remarked Maurice, looking up from his papers.

"I don't doubt it," declared Frank with a sigh. "I console myself, however, for not having been in your place, Maurice, by the flattering conviction that Mrs. Knight considers me far too youthful and charming to be permitted to go alone to the beach with her niece. Advanced age has its prerogatives, I grant, yet it is something to be young and fascinating,

even if when I take Miss Clairmont to drive we need to be duly chaperoned."

"It is not my gray hairs in which Mrs. Knight puts her faith, but my discretion," retorted Maurice, laughing and again looking up from his papers.

"There is something quite affable about Maurice to-night," said Mrs. Meredith, preparing to open a budget of home-letters which had just come in. "But he is generally happy when he has the newspapers.—Does Rosamond allow you to read them before her, Maurice?"

"If you ask her, she will say I do nothing else."

"Maurice is a cross between a blue-book and a statue," said Frank. "When I am so lucky as to be engaged, I shall not read papers as I sit by my ——"

"Your ——? What under heaven does he mean? When, my dear innocent victim of hallucination, you are so unfortunate as to be engaged, you will begin to appreciate the real worth of a newspaper: you will be so tired of fiction and fantasy, of the unreality and unsubstantiality of your world of thought, that you will be but too thankful to settle down on a basis of calm sense. Dreams are very well for a time, but give me facts, facts, facts!"

Frank, sitting by Felise in the window, looked at her so fixedly that presently she turned and met his eyes. "This is pleasant, is it not?" he whispered—"so much better than the dull evening I expected."

"It is charming," she returned with a smile.

"Is the blue dress finished?" broke in Mrs. Meredith.

"Not quite, but I shall put on the last ruffle to-morrow."

"May I go up and sit by you while you sew?" inquired Maurice from behind the *Express*.

Frank burst out laughing. "I shall be there," said he.

"But is there not another vacant chair beside Miss Clairmont's work-table? I love to see a woman at her needle."

"Oh, Felise," cried Violet, "how can you sew? I should as soon think of building the house I live in as of making the dress I wear."

"I should suspect, Pansy," said Maurice, "that you would have an aversion to needlework."

"Pray tell me if Miss Clifford sews," she asked satirically.

"Never: at least I have never seen her with a needle."

"Since you admire white fingers at work, why not set Miss Clifford to sewing for your amusement?"

"My dear Pansy, it might not amuse me. As a rule, I have little time to sit by the distaff. I find Saintford air develops many tastes I never knew before: you may regard them as phenomena, not as essential traits of character."

Luigi had lit the lamps in the library, and Maurice and Mrs. Meredith took their papers and letters there. Violet and Morton vanished through the long French window into the shrubberies and the gathering twilight. Frank was alone with Felise, who was sitting on the low window-seat, leaning out and playing with a vine that stretched across and twined around the shutter. She was smiling, the light breeze swayed her floating hair, and the loose lace-bordered sleeves fell back from the perfect hands and wrists. She was as unconscious of her charming attitude as a child, and presently she turned back and sang a verse from an old song in a tender voice, quite ignorant of what a fever she was stirring in his heart:

"Through groves of palm sigh gales of balm,  
Fire-flies on the air are wheeling,  
While through the gloom comes soft perfume,  
The distant beds of flowers revealing.

That makes the night perfect, does it not?" she said, looking at him archly.

"Not quite," he answered with a throbbing heart.

"Not quite? I think you are hard to satisfy. What else would you have?"

"Shall I tell you?" he murmured, bending over her so closely that she felt the meaning of his smile and the light in his eyes with a full perception of his further requirements, although she would not confess the knowledge to herself.

"No, no!" she cried, shrinking back, "do not tell me."

"It shall be just as you say for a little

longer," said he sadly. "But do you care nothing for my wishes?"

She leaned from the window again and pulled a rose from the vine. "This is what you want," she said coaxingly: "I will give this to you."

"You give roses to every one. I saw you pick six roses from your bush yesterday and give them to six different men, all equally obnoxious to me. You are like Flora—you scatter roses."

"But I will do more with this: I will put it in your buttonhole." She turned as she spoke to place it. He bent toward her, and her slim fingers adjusted the flower. He looked down at her as she stood so confidingly within the circle of his arms had he outstretched them, and felt a lover's fierce longing to seize and hold her there. But Felise, glancing up in his face, thought him cold and indifferent.

"Are you angry with me?" she cried tremulously.

He took her hands, held them tightly an instant while he gazed into her eyes: then he thrust them from him. "Felise," said he smiling, but with some passion, "what a child you are!"

"But I am not a child," she returned, half pouting. "Why did you seem so strange? Were you really angry?"

"Angry!" repeated poor Frank. "What do you think about it? What may I say? Do you give me leave to say what is in my heart?"

"No, no!" she cried, drawing back and trembling at his vehemence.

"Well, then," said he with a wild sort of laugh, "I am not allowed to speak, yet if I make a supreme effort and hold my tongue, you think me disagreeably cross. I said just now, 'What a child you are!' Let me say, rather, what a woman you are!"

She perceived that he was entertained by something and could hardly smother his inclination to laugh out. "What is it?" she demanded imperiously. "You must tell me what it is. I will not have you laughing at me: I am too old to be treated like a child."

Frank laughed uncontrollably, but he could not tell her what secret thought

diverted him. A man in love is always liable to be moved at times by a sense of the absurdity of his position, and if his suit has a chance of ultimate success, he can afford to smile at the dainty defiance of the lips he means soon to kiss, the mutinous glance of the eyes he intends shall soon droop before his own unveiled gaze, the touch-me-not dignity of the hands he believes will shortly be but too glad to nestle of their own accord within his clasp.

"I treat you like a child!" he exclaimed. "On the contrary, I stand completely in awe of you. Tell me, please, how old you are."

"I shall be twenty in October."

"And I am almost thirty-six. Think of it, Felise—I am almost sixteen years older than you! Still, I would not be younger, even if I could. Do you remember the French proverb, '*Si la jeunesse savait—si la vieillesse pouvait*'? My age has all the advantages of both capacities. I know the possibilities of youthful happiness, yet have not passed the period—or at least I hope I have not—when I may seize and hold them."

"Men are so fortunate!" said Felise after a moment's pause. "If women are wise, it is because their beauty has gone, and their youth, and they have looked desolation and sorrow in the face. Then only do they know what the inspiration of their youth was worth."

"You shall never be wise," cried Frank ardently. "Felise, you shall never be old."

"How can I help it?" she asked. "But, alas! I fear you are right in one way: even if I grow old I shall never grow wise."

"Let me be your friend," he cried again impetuously, "and you shall go through life without experiencing the bitterness that comes to so many. Oh, I could not endure to see you anything less than you are now—that innocence and purity upon your brow, that smile of a waking child!"

"Hush!" she murmured: "you must not flatter me;" and she hung her head, for Frank was far less guarded than he had ever been before.

The parlor where they were sitting was almost dark now, and Mrs. Meredith, issuing from the lighted library, laughed at the two for sitting so romantically in the summer twilight. She had news, she came to tell them. Leslie Wilmot had written her that he could not endure England without Violet; that his expedition to Norway had been given up; that he was about to follow them to the States; and that she must not let Pansy be too hard upon him for doing so. Luigi brought in lights, and Mrs. Meredith chattered gayly on of the miseries of a woman's life when she was so unfortunate as to have a marriageable daughter. If the marriage had only taken place at Easter! Nothing but Violet's caprice deferred the consummation of the engagement. With her only daughter comfortably invested with a respectable man's name, the volatile lady declared she could begin life anew without an annoyance in the world. The peal of the door-bell interrupted her, and Mrs. Meredith went down the entire length of the long parlors with her letters for a fresh perusal of them in her particular nook in one of the bay-windows. Luigi brought in a card to his master, who looked at it with a puzzled face.

"Malcolm Leslie Arbuthnot Wilmot," he repeated, staring blankly. "I cannot seem to think who he is."

But while he was speaking a young man advanced into the room, hat in hand, and walked eagerly up to him. "Don't you know me?" he asked. "I remember you perfectly, Mr. Layton. Are the Merediths here? I am Leslie Wilmot."

Mrs. Meredith fluttered toward them, and while Frank was making hospitable inquiries of Wilmot she turned to Felise and whispered a request to her to go quietly and find Violet, apologizing hastily for asking this service of her.

Felise ran out gladly, and as she passed the study-door Maurice joined her. "Where are you going?" he asked. "To look for Violet? She is in the garden with Morton: I had a glimpse of them in the shrubberies. May I go with you?"

She took his proffered arm, and they

strolled down the garden-path in the odorous July dusk. "So the bridegroom has come for the unwise virgin?" continued Maurice with some glee. "Do you suppose Pansy will be glad of the news?"

"You engaged people know your own secrets best," retorted Felise, laughing softly. "I suppose she will be charmed to see him."

"*Nous autres fiancés*, we know that under certain circumstances even our nearest and dearest are altogether in the way. For instance, do you fancy I should have been glad to see Miss Clifford this afternoon if she had risen like Venus from the sea-foam to find me stretched at your feet discoursing of love? Or, indeed, even now, for what could be more suggestive of romance than this innocent little promenade of ours?"

Felise did not know exactly what to say, so with a smile she slowly raised her eyes until they met his, then dropped them. It was late evening now: the stars shone golden in the pale hazy depths of the sky, but the glow of the sunset still lingered in the west and gleamed through the interlaced branches of the elms on the one hand, while on the other the tall trees stood like motionless giants glooming together in a sombre mass. Not a leaf moved, scarcely a sound was to be heard, yet there seemed no silence.

"Yes, there they are in the arbor," remarked Maurice, shaking off a sort of disinclination to speak. They paused opposite the summer-house, where they could distinctly see two figures revealed in silhouette against the background of daffodil western sky. It was startlingly evident to both observers that Morton was standing with Violet's hands in his, and, half kneeling, half bending, was kissing them repeatedly.

"Violet!" called Maurice in a voice which struck his cousin's ear like a bugle *réveil*. She turned slowly. Morton started back, and leaned against the framework of the arbor.

"Is that you, Maurice?" she asked.

"It is. Here are Miss Clairmont and I quite worn out with our search for you. Somebody wants to see you."

"What an exigent some one! Who

is there in this hemisphere that I need see unless I feel inclined? I thought I had left that sort of thing behind me in England."

"That sort of thing is ubiquitous, awfully mal-apropos: it follows one everywhere."

At the same moment another form became defined out of the rapidly-thickening dusk, and another voice called "Violet! Violet!" and the chief actor entered and carried off all the honors of the scene.

"What! is it you, Leslie?" she cried in surprise.

He put his arms about her and clasped her closely. "My darling!" he whispered, "I could not stay away."

"Silly boy!" said she in her witching way, but evading his embrace, "remember how to behave yourself. But I am very glad to see you.—Good friends, it is too dark here to make introductions, so we will wait until we meet in Frank's parlor."

She passed on with Wilmot, leaving Maurice and Felise by the door of the summer-house, and Morton within, quite invisible in the gloom.

"Here, Morton," said Maurice, "give your arm to Miss Clairmont: I have a fancy to walk about and get cool before I go back."

Morton left the shadow and offered his arm to the young girl. Maurice's knowledge of men was certain, and it was creditable in him just then to draw the angry man within the circle of conventionalities. The two walked toward the house together, following Wilmot, whose voice was clearly distinguishable as he rattled on to Violet, loitering along the path with his arm around her.

"Oh, I am glad to see you of course," Violet returned after he had inquired a dozen times how she felt regarding his unexpected advent. "But I don't know how you can amuse yourself here. We are as quiet as church mice, and have put off traveling until September."

"Oh, as to that," said Leslie, "I'll manage capitally. I inquired at once if Saintford touched navigable water anywhere, and engaged a yacht as soon as I landed."

"Was it easy to suit yourself?"

"Not at first. This one was engaged for the middle of July for a two months' cruise, but I offered too powerful an argument for any Yankee to refuse."

"What was your argument?"

"The only one I ever needed yet. I could afford to bid higher than other men. Don't you know, I always get what I want? She'll be here in a few days. I ordered her freshened up—new carpets and cushions, you know, and that sort of thing—fit for ladies, you know. You'll cruise about with me a little, won't you, Pansy?"

"I hate yachts. You love your yacht better than you love me."

"Do I, though? When once you marry me I'll give up yachting entirely if you say it, though it is such a jolly life cruising about. Who was it said I was her idea of a 'jolly tar'? Oh, Lulu Thatcher."

"Don't dare to talk about Lulu Thatcher!"

"By Jove! you've no call to be jealous about her, Pansy. She used to propose to me regularly every day last year when we went up to Skye, but she never caught me tripping. Oh, Pansy, to be with you again! Do you know, this yacht was called the Tide Wave, but I had it painted out and your name put in its place. But you never saw the real Pansy. She's a perfect beauty—purple velvet and gold trimmings, pansies embroidered everywhere—painted on the panels, even on the china. I wanted to come over in her, but the good mamma was ill at the bare notion, so I gave it up."

"Where is your old Pansy now?"

"I lent her to Cromley: he and his bride are among the Hebrides, I have no doubt."

"That was very pretty of you."

"Isn't he your cousin? I hope Mr. Frank Layton has ordered me some dinner, supper or something. 'Hungry' is not just the word for me." And with this artless prattle Wilmot beguiled Violet's walk to the house, and Morton, ten paces off, heard every word, chewing meanwhile the cud of his own bitter thoughts.

## PART III.

### CHAPTER IX.

FRANK LAYTON was a good deal occupied now-a-days with his guests, both permanent and transient, the entertainment of whom kept the cottage in a condition of incessant festivity, which, although pleasant enough for the bright young people, who demanded a summer like a continuous fête, was wearisome to a host whose interest in humanity in general was at present limited by his regard for one woman in particular. He no longer had an opportunity to spend even his mornings at Mr. Knight's, and it was his brother who had there succeeded to his place of *ami de la maison*. Maurice, in fact, had no inclination to dawdle about the cottage in the mornings devoting himself to his aunt and cousin. He was benevolently contemptuous of such social requirements, and preferred spending his time in the manner most agreeable to himself. His correspondence and the morning papers occupied most of the forenoon. Afterward, since work did not press, he sought relaxation, and found it, in the society of Miss Clairmont. He took the same sort of pleasure in this that a man somewhat tired and dispirited might take in throwing himself on a bank of violets and wild thyme, with the softest breaths of sweet south winds unstringing his highly-wrought nerves. He not only admired Felise very much, but she suited him. He had gradually grown into the habit of talking to her very freely, and was at times absolutely startled by the fact that he was telling her a thousand things of which he had hitherto spoken to no one—experiences, feelings, despondencies of his own, whose existence even Rosamond was comfortably remote from suspecting. He understood his present position perfectly, and decided that it was not in the least prejudicial to either Frank's or Miss Clifford's interests that he found such pleasure in Felise's society. He was forty-three, and of course no man can be so

old without becoming very experienced and thoroughly master of himself. In a case of infatuation he could easily repress any inclination to commit himself, and could sagely reduce his experience within the bounds of formula, and argue that, constituted as man is, with the necessity of feeling satiety and disenchantment as soon as he possesses any object of desire, it is well for him that worship of something he can never attain should have some place in his inner life. What else explained the fact that sober *pères de famille* read poetry and romance with a completer abandon than boys? No one could study history intelligently without recognizing the fact that unappeased masculine passion was one of the strongest motive powers of human achievement. Not that Maurice had yet reached the point where it was essential for him to convince himself that he was doing the best thing he could under the circumstances; but it was his habit of mind to do his thinking before a possible emergency. Just now, however, he thought of himself as little as possible. It was delicious summer weather, and he was among a coterie of agreeable people, whose occupation in life was to do the most agreeable things they found to do by night and by day. Every one amused himself in the way he liked best, the only law being that of natural selection. He himself preferred, of all that Saintford offered, to go to the Knights': he liked Mr. Knight, who was an indefatigable talker; he liked Mrs. Knight with her fine eyes and rounded majestic form, which carried the sweetness and dignity of matronliness in its every movement; and as for Felise, she was Frank's future wife, and it pleased his fraternal sense to discover every day some fresh and more adorable trait. He had renounced small desires for his own part, and knew himself to be quite out of place in this elegant, fictitious, unreal life, so calculated to undermine a man's

conviction that the end of his career is not, after all, to look into a woman's eyes, be they never so witching. But, stirred by the interest he felt in his brother's love, he liked to watch Felise in her home and learn all he could about her ways and thoughts. Mr. Knight was never quite far away from her, for he not only loved her for her sweet girlish sake, but, like other learned men who have clever sympathetic women about them, he used her memory like a book of notes, and was calling constantly, "Felise, look up so and so;" or, "What was it, my child, I told you to remember on this point?" Mr. Knight's most abstruse studies were familiar ground to the young girl, although the subjects themselves were without interest to her except as she saw them through the eyes of the good old man. It is sometimes easy for a woman to seize, apparently without effort, an idea for whose mastery a man grapples desperately for years. Her attitude of mind is receptive: she absorbs thoughts, broods over them, and presently understands their meanings in a way that may make her intellect infinitely suggestive to her father or husband if he but brings her within the circle of his own original thought and invention.

"Your niece is a wonderfully clever child," Maurice remarked once to Mr. Knight.

"Not at all. Felise is merely bright and versatile, like other girls of her age," returned Mr. Knight. "I hate superior literary females. The Harriet Martineaus and Margaret Fullers of the world bore me to death, but I do love a cultivated woman. Felise has all the poetry and mythologies of the ages at her tongue's end: she has touched everywhere in her reading and study, but settled nowhere as yet. She is of immense service to me from a literary point of view. When she looks over my shoulder her pretty fancies give me sudden flashes of a wider light, and my page is brightened up by her suggestions. Still, don't fancy her remarkably clever. All her facility comes from her faculty of loving. She must be everything to me because she loves me."

Mr. Knight went back to his study, and Maurice sauntered down the terrace toward Felise, who was busy among the ferns in her rock-work. He sank down silently upon a bench and watched her, thinking over her uncle's words. What a good, loving little girl she was! What a wife she would be for Frank! and she could make a clever man of him too. He sighed as if stirred by a regret.

"Don't soil your fingers digging about those roots," he exclaimed abruptly. "Look at your hands."

She regarded them with a shamefaced air. "I can wash them," said she deprecatingly. "I will go and wash them in the fountain." She started up and ran across the lawn. He followed her, and as she leaned over the basin she saw his face reflected in the water. She laughed. "Do you remember how Corinne saw Lord Nelvil looking over her in the fountain of Trevi?" she asked.

"I believe so. I always hated that book."

"Why? For years and years I read no other romance. I knew it all by heart, and thought it the most beautiful book in the world."

"I dare say. Lord Nelvil is the true type of a woman's hero."

"He meant to do well."

"Very likely, but the reason he did not succeed was because he was a sneak and could not do well. But I do not like Corinne. A fine creature, doubtless, but she talked too much. Yes, even for a woman, she talked too much."

"But she talked gloriously."

"Yes. But it is such a bore to be declaimed at! It is my business, you know, to declaim, and I won't suffer the infliction from others if I can help it. I know the worth of loud, fluent, unhesitating, eloquent harangues. I should never have been reduced to a state of simmering passion by Corinne or her prototype, Madame de Staël."

"I fancy most men dislike women of superior minds," Felise retorted.

"Do they?" exclaimed Maurice with an air of frank regret. "I was just telling your uncle that I thought you so amazingly clever."

"But I am not at all clever," returned Felise. "Pray do not consider me so."

"You are a second Corinne," observed Maurice gravely. "After meeting you one longs for a pretty fool instead."

Felise rose from the bank and walked with much stateliness back to her fernery, but her dignity was somewhat diminished by the fact that her hands were dripping, for she could not find her handkerchief.

"What are you looking for?" inquired Maurice.

"My handkerchief: I dropped it here."

"Allow me to offer mine," he suggested, drawing a great square of cambric from his pocket, and going up to her he deliberately wiped her hands with scrupulous pains. "Those mighty members are dry now, I believe," said he, holding them up and scrutinizing them. "Why do you not thank me, you ungrateful little girl?"

But she turned away, sat down and took up her book. Complete silence reigned for five minutes.

"Is this a maiden-hair fern?" said Maurice, artlessly indicating a *Pteris*.

"No," she returned, pointing to another: "*that* is a maiden-hair fern."

"The name is poor and meaningless. Ferns resemble nothing in the way of hair."

But her smile was very languid, and she appeared quite absorbed in her reading.

"Do I bore you?" he asked after another interval of silence.

"A little," she said with a nod.

"I do not believe it," he returned flatly. "I have been, however, so unfortunate as to vex you." As he spoke he sat down beside her, and leaning forward looked up into her face. To his dismay he saw tears in her eyes. "Why, my dear child!" he cried with concern, "what have I done?"

"Nothing," she murmured with more tears. "Oh, if I only had my handkerchief!"

He offered her his own with a grand air. She wiped her eyes, laughed foolishly and gave it back to him.

"I think you are a silly child, not a clever woman at all," said he indulgent-

ly. "The next time I go to town I shall make a point of bringing you a box of bonbons. Do you want me to go away? Please let me stay until I may count myself forgiven."

"I am ashamed of my foolishness," she murmured, hanging her head. "I do not often cry, but it was cruel of you to say you thought me pedantic and dull."

"Did I say that?" he asked, bending close to her. "I do think you are clever, but don't be pained by that conviction of mine, for, whatever you are, you seem to me to possess every quality that is most charming. Never mistake my teasing words again."

Her eyes were fixed upon him while two great tears trembled on the lashes, then slowly ran down her cheeks. He wiped them off, laughing a little. "I wish," said he with a kind glance, "that I had a daughter just like you."

"Oh, I never heard anything so ridiculous!"

"Not at all ridiculous. Why, little girl, I am almost forty-three years old! Had I married when I was twenty-one, I might easily have had a daughter of your age."

"But no man should marry when he is a boy, a mere boy. Besides, there is nothing about you to suggest that you are old enough to be anybody's father," cried Felise with great disdain.

"Well, perhaps I do not look fatherly at present. But I may some time have a daughter, and I trust she may resemble you. I shall call her Felise."

"I forbid you," she cried with some fire in her eyes. "Besides," she added, smiling rather wickedly, "I do not think Mrs. Maurice Layton would like it."

"Rosamond would not care. I shall have my own way by that time. I am charmed with the fancy of my little Felise," said he, half closing his eyes. "She shall love me better than any one in the world. I shall wipe away her tears, kiss her sorrowful little face into smiles. I shall have all her kisses, her caresses. Yes, my little girl's name shall be Felise."

But the real, living Felise smiled, with

some pain or bitterness behind her smile. "I do not believe you will love the child at all," she affirmed vehemently. "Besides, you will be so engrossed in your busy life that you will not know your children to call them by their names. As for that poor little girl, she will find no one in the world to love her, and will die very young." Then she laughed at her own absurdity and rose. "It is time to dress for the lunch on the yacht," she added.

"Yes: I am to accompany you and Mrs. Knight. I have some gloves in my pocket. While you are in-doors I will sit here and read the papers."

"I will send them out to you."

"That is good of you. But see, Miss Clairmont, shall I keep this?" And he drew a little crumpled bit of cambric from his pocket.

"Where did you find my handkerchief?" she asked.

"You dropped it on your way to the fountain, and I picked it up. I should be glad to keep it, but one of your lovers might see it in my possession, and a modern Othello would surely smother me instead of you. So I will give it back."

"Ah, how good of you!" said Felise with a little curtsy. "I saw you take it, and was about to ask for it."

"I knew that you saw me pick it up," retorted Maurice with some malice. "I believe you intended that I should preserve it as a sentimental keepsake. What a Desdemona it is!" And at her spirited denial he merely shrugged his shoulders. "I always thought," he resumed, "that Desdemona was a trifle of a coquette. I dare say she intended that famous handkerchief should reach Cassio."

Felise left him with an air of revolt. He rose and sprang after her. "Let me go in with you," said he; "I will find the papers for myself."

twenty or more were to lunch in her cabin. Leslie had entered into the easy, pleasure-seeking life going on at Saintford with considerable zest, and being ready at any time to contribute his quota of hospitality in the handsomest manner, was to-day receiving his friends in his yachting costume, the flags of two great nations flying at the masthead and a band playing in a boat anchored at the stern. It was a little unhandsome, then, for his guests to make comparisons invidious to their host, but Morton stood near Wilmot on the deck, also in yachting-dress, and, with his priceless accomplishment of wearing clothes well, made Leslie appear like an awkward, tasteless cub. Maurice remarked the contrast in the appearance of the two men to Felise as they stood together taking stock of the social materials about them.

"I admire yachting-suits," she replied, "whether they are worn by graceful authors or wealthy young Britons. Why did you not do something in that way, Mr. Layton?"

"I? Oh, I don't go in for fascination.—Frank, come here a minute;" and that gentleman advanced with only too much alacrity from Mrs. Dury's side to make his bow to Miss Clairmont. "This young lady is asking why I am not in navy blue and gilt buttons, just as if she did not perceive that I am in the sere and yellow leaf instead. But you, my dear fellow, have no excuse for looking such a wretched landlubber."

Frank looked down at his morning-dress with a grimace. "You touch a tender chord when you allude to my dress, Miss Clairmont," said he. "I once enjoyed the fondest hopes of shining in your presence like Morton and Wilmot. My tailor sent me a fortnight ago a full yachting-suit, which was more becoming than, as a modest man, I dare confess to you. Since my first boots and trousers I have worn nothing so calculated to inspire perfect self-satisfaction. I looked at myself in the glass and meditated conquest. To-day at half-past one I went to my room eager to assume it, but I only had my hand on my wardrobe-door when Luigi entered. He had come,

#### CHAPTER X.

WILMOT'S yacht, the Pansy, had at once become useful in varying the amusements of our coterie, and to-day she lay anchored in the river, and a party of

he said, for a good word from his master for the new clothes he had got up regardless of expense out of compliment to Mr. Wilmot, who had asked his assistance here to-day. Just look at him there!"

They all turned, and beheld Luigi's tawny face surmounting the most picturesque of yachting costumes. He was assisting the guests up the ladder with a graciousness that led several strangers to believe that he was the host himself, much to the suppressed indignation of Wilmot's own respectable servant, who, in undertaker's black, with the funereal cast of countenance essential to the representative English flunkey, looked with withering scorn upon the airs and graces of the sunny Italian.

Felise laughed. "*Aristo va*," said she. "You should have worn your own suit, nevertheless."

"I did not mind my aristocracy so much. The fact was, he looked so confoundedly young and handsome that the contrast disclosed the bitter truth of my thirty-six years. All Alnaschar visions fled: I meekly continued to wear the dress that Maurice has so slightly noticed."

"That boy of yours will be my death," said Maurice. "There is a superb insouciance about him which gives me fits of internal laughter. Imagine me, Miss Clairmont, returning to Frank's house at one o'clock at night, and finding Luigi on the back lawn with a guitar singing the serenade from *Don Pasquale* under one of the windows of the wing. I inquired grimly, as he advanced at my call, what under Heaven he was doing at that unearthly hour: he returned with the air of Don Juan that he was serenading 'la petite Jeannette.' 'I have noticed her black eyes,' said I, wishing to propitiate him, since I wanted some supper—'I have noticed her black eyes, you lucky dog!' 'Non c'e male,' he rejoined with that little slighting Italian gesture of his, 'but my weakness is for blondes. I admire Miss Clairmont.'"

"Pray, Miss Clairmont," interposed Frank, annoyed, "don't fancy I keep the fellow for his impudence. It was a duty I made for myself, the obligations

of which I was far from recognizing at the time. At first I took him to amuse me. I discovered him on a doorstep in Naples, a beautiful little brown beggar, munching a piece of bread and smelling a bunch of roses at the same time. He belonged to nobody, and I carried him off as I would have done a picture of a baby Bacchus. But he grew up, alas! and would not be educated: nothing but a servant would he make, and for an easy master he is the perfection of a servant."

"I think he is delightful," said Felise. "I do not know that he is a good model for servants in general, but he fits in among your possessions like one of your tables of malachite and pietra dura, or one of your old majolica cups with dragon handles: he is an animated phenomenon of bric-à-brac taste."

"You consider me, then," observed Frank, looking at her with a peculiarly clear glance from his blue eyes, "a mere virtuoso, a curiosity-collector?"

"Not *merely* that, by any means," cried Felise in some distress; "but confess that the working part of your life has been the gathering together of a vast quantity of trifles."

"Do not call that work," said Frank coolly. "Say that I have done no work at all—that I am an idler by taste and deliberate choice. But what could I have done to gain your approval? Certainly, you would not have had me compete with other men in money-getting, when I have already as much as is good for me? Shall I set up as politician and run in opposition to Maurice? Shall I publish the poems I wrote before I was twenty? Shall I go on the stage or patent my last bungle at a garden-roller? Your discontent with my aim in life stirs all sorts of possibilities in my mind, Miss Clairmont. Your wishes are sacred to me: you have only to point out the way."

Mrs. Meredith beckoned to Frank, and he went off for a consultation with his aunt and Wilmot respecting some of the arrangements down stairs.

"You fail to do Frank justice, Miss Clairmont," said Maurice in a low voice and with a glance before which Felise

quailed. "I think few men have accomplished half the good he has done in the world. Why should he push against others in the arena when his place outside has afforded him opportunities to gain more friends to bless him with grateful personal devotion than all the men I know put together? If you slight him, if you do not appreciate how much above every one else he is, what will become of my faith in you?—Here, Frank, they are going down to lunch: you are to take Miss Clairmont."

"I have not that honor," returned poor Frank with a grand bow. "'Tis you, Maurice, who are apportioned to her. I am to take Mrs. Dury: Aunt Agnes said so."

"I am going to take Mrs. Dury myself," said Maurice. "You are a disengaged man, Frank, and it will never do for you to be abandoned for two mortal hours to the fascinations of a widow with proclivities toward flirtation." And he took leave of Miss Clairmont, and went over to Mrs. Dury with a valiant air.

"I am sorry for you," murmured Felise as she put her hand on Frank's arm.

"You are a trifle insincere, Miss Clairmont."

"But you do not seem pleased at being left with me."

"Do I not?" returned Frank with a sigh, for he was far from being perfectly contented or happy. "Know, then, once for all, mademoiselle, there is just one woman in the world whom I wish to take in to breakfast, to luncheon, to dinner—to walk with, to talk with, to weep with, to rejoice with."

Felise gave him a glance which, considering that she must have attained to some realization of her power over him, was, it must be confessed, rather a naughty little glance. "I wonder who that woman is?" she remarked. "I hope, Mr. Layton, when you do succeed in carrying out that programme, that you will not condemn your life for being too monotonous."

"Felise," he whispered in her ear, "don't you remember the day I begged you not to use your power to torture me?"

"One would think," she returned with

a sincere pout, "that I was a monster of the Inquisition and used thumbscrews."

"You have nicer arts of torture. Remember that you have it in your power to pain me in forty thousand different ways, whereas you can please me only in one."

She looked at him with unaffected surprise. "Only one way of pleasing you!" she ejaculated. "You are very hard to please. What must I do then, monsieur, in order to win your distinguished approbation?"

Frank colored, but enjoyed his moment exceedingly before he spoke. Then he whispered something in her ear which made Felise quite unable to reply. "You can marry me," said he so very softly that the suggestion came almost like a revelation of her own inward consciousness.

They went down the companion-way together, both looking exceedingly demure, but Frank was all at once in excellent spirits. Why should he not be? He was in love, and on his coat-sleeve rested a little hand in a lavender glove, the hand he wanted out of all the world, and almost touching his shoulder was a flower-like face, the secret of whose scarlet cheeks and downcast eyes he knew, and he alone. Decidedly, this lunch was an agreeable affair, he thought to himself.

Society is one of those results of civilization which we all accept and pay homage to, yet, as soon as we know it well, condemn in our hearts for its frivolity, its vulgarity, its dullness. We are wise people: we know the world, we understand the pushings, the strivings, the heartburnings, the foolish extravagance of effort and thought and means for compassing certain ends not worth gaining after all. Sitting in a corner looking on, we may declare the diamonds paste, the smiles and laughter forced and untrue, the wit hackneyed and meagre, and the feast spoiled. But while people are fortunate enough to be young, to be loving or beloved, no prescience of this sort mars the grace of the festivity, for such wisdom comes only to the spectators who have no rôles to play, no bright eyes to seek, no little pearly ears

to whisper audacious speeches into, but who, with nothing to do but to wait for their supper, fall to impugning the good sense of their luckier neighbors.

Frank had assisted at many feasts, but thought nothing had ever been so delightful as this. He had most certainly declared himself to Felise, and his words had startled her into a confusion from which she could not easily recover; and even if she had not given him reason for felicitating himself, she had not repulsed him. Had he gone down to lunch with some other woman, he would have declared the cabin far too small for the splendid table and the throng of guests, and not even the sea-breeze sweeping through could have made the air, so heavily perfumed by the flowers in the *épergnes*, anything less than stifling. But to sit by Felise for a clear hour, looking into her upraised eyes, watching the smiles and dimples come and go on the lovely face, stooping to hear her low words in that sweet Southern voice with its melodious foreign accent, made him as happy as a girl at her first ball. If one person out of two score of people can thus enjoy himself, surely society is a benevolent arrangement, and the thirty-nine others who are bored ought to be glad of the opportunity of thus benefiting a man in love.

Across the table sat Miss Meredith, with half a dozen men hanging over her chair or bending toward her. She was consequently in high spirits. Few women possessed her wit, and one who saw her for the first time was apt to consider her somewhat daring speech a relief from the usual vapid talk of unmarried girls; but as soon as he became fascinated by the woman, attracted by her beauty or interested in her character, he ceased to be dazzled by the sort of wit she aimed at, and discovered that her words were too reckless. Still, she possessed in a rare degree the power not only of listening well, but of divining what inadequate expression left unsaid—of leading a man on into speech he thought never to have made, for she herself seemed inspired by the words she invoked, and would be carried away by her imaginative fancy into eloquence. But, like many another woman

of better intellect than discernment, when once fired into interest she would listen with apparent pleasure to anything a man felt disposed to offer in the way of mot or epigram, provided it carried the stamp of cleverness upon it, and would go further still in repartee even when her words might be judged to leave her in the most questionable position. In short, Violet Meredith was at times so unfortunate as to impress those men to whom she talked freely with the idea that she was not over-fastidious; and to-day Morton, while sitting beside her listening to her gay badinage with two or three middle-aged army officers then visiting in Saintford, absolutely ground his teeth in anger at her recklessness in replying with usury to the remarks they made, which, although gracefully wrapped up, were of anything but doubtful meaning to the ears of Morton. While he sat there frowning into his wine-glass as he leaned his elbow on the table, Mrs. Dury's little girl clambered upon his knee and looked into his face. "What is the matter?" she asked in her shrill childish voice. "You look cross. I wish I could tell you a story, and that might do you good."

"I wish you could do me good," returned Morton, caressing the child, who was an exquisite, fairy-like little creature, and everybody's pet. She had a face like a wild flower, without any positive beauty, but which moved a strong impulse of tenderness.

She looked at him soberly. "I remember the story you told me," she said slowly. "I can tell it to you again if you want me to."

"Yes, that is just what I want," answered Morton, half amused at her persistence, half bored. As for himself, he had forgotten the story.

"There was a man," began Bel, "once upon a time, and he said, 'There is something in the world for me somewhere: let me go find it.' You see, he had nothing, and other men had heaps of things," added Bel explanatorily, "and he knew that the good God must have made him something too. So he went out, and traveled over the sea and over the land, and one day he came to a garden, and

there he saw a rose. You're sure you're listening, Mr. Morton?"

"Oh yes, Bel: I hear every word."

"Well," pursued Bel, "the rose was such a beautiful rose that he picked it, and thought that he had found what he wanted. Now, on the stem of the rose was a thorn, and that tore his hand until it bled, but he did not mind that. So he put the rose in his bosom, and was beginning to be very happy when all at once he saw that it had withered—that its brightness was all gone and its leaves were falling. He threw it away: it had not paid him for the scratch it gave him."

She paused and nodded wisely. Morton was listening now intently. Something about the earnest little face and the pure treble voice touched his heart.

"Then," went on Bel, "he picked up a great splendid diamond. This made him feel rich, it was so large, so costly and gave such a light. But, after all, what could he do with it? If it had been a pebble like the other round pebbles of the seashore, it would have made him just as happy."

"Of course it would," observed Morton smiling.

"So," said Bel, "he put it away in his pocket out of sight, and went on and on. And when he was getting all tired out he lay down under a tree and went to sleep. He slept a long time, and finally when he woke up he heard a little child crying somewhere near him."

"Ah, that was it!" cried Morton: "now I remember."

"Yes," said Bel: "it was a little girl, just like me, who had lost her way. She had no father and no mother, and nothing to eat, and no shoes upon her poor little bare feet. So he took her up in his arms and carried her over the rough stones, and he fed her from his knapsack, and he made her laugh and forget all her tears. And she lived with him always, and he never said any more that he had got nothing that he wanted."

"That was a remarkably nice story as you told it," said Morton. "I really think that if a nice pretty little girl like that were to come to me in my sleep, I should give up seeking for roses and diamonds."

Bel was fond but fickle, and seeing another knee to mount and another shoulder to nestle against, she passed on. Morton turned back to Miss Meredith, who had flushed with the warmth, and looked less handsome to him than usual. The talk was still going on merrily, and Morton in his soul loathed every word he heard, the laughter and the bold careless glances of the men toward her. He proposed to Violet to leave the stifling air of the cabin for the deck, and she acceded to his suggestion readily enough.

It was cooler and quieter above, beneath the tasseled awnings. Here Morton's spirits, which had been at their lowest ebb, rose, while Violet's sank, as they always sank when any social stimulant was withdrawn. She replied in monosyllables or not at all as she sat on a pile of cushions, now and then shooting glances from her sleepy cruel eyes across to the spot where her elder cousin stood talking to Felise.

"Do you admire Miss Clairmont?" she asked presently, still playing with the heavy fringes of her bracelets, but looking at her companion for the first time.

"Oh yes," returned Morton coolly: "I am not churlish enough to refuse admiration to a young and beautiful girl."

"What is it you admire in her? Her hair, for instance?—like pale gold bronze, is it not?"

"I care very little for the shimmer of golden hair."

"But her eyes are so dark—wonderfully appealing eyes: their expression fascinates you."

"I am too much fascinated by the expression of other dark eyes."

"Is it her smile that bewitches you? Or is it her figure, which is perfect? Or her hands, which have been modeled in Rome, you know? Then her feet are exquisite: look at them now as she goes up the ladder."

Morton smothered something like an execration. "What do you mean by talking to me about Miss Clairmont in this way? There is but one woman in the world for me."

Violet smiled, a slow, tantalizing smile. "But you declared that you admired

her. I am anxious to know what is this crowning charm which draws all men to her feet. There are other cheeks and lips whose color comes and goes—sometimes wandering idly, sometimes answering words and glances—other smiles, other sweet low voices, yet no one has any chance when she is near.”

Every man in love is occasionally fool enough to fancy that a word from him may suggest the one lacking grace to the woman he declares he perfectly adores.

“Miss Clairmont is very pretty, but I doubt if a sort of infantile innocence and bloom is not one of her chief charms to the men who come about her. We all love to feel that the woman we love is good—so pure that we may safely build our religion upon her—that—”

“I am afraid,” exclaimed Violet with a shrug and a half laugh, “that your romance is not founded upon fact. Do you build your religion upon my goodness, for instance?”

“I am certain of your goodness,” Morton replied with a painful lack of discernment; “and when your careless words sometimes lead one to doubt the purity of your meaning, I can only attribute it to your false idea of the characters of men. If you really wish to please me, Violet, you would never again talk as you have talked to-day.”

Violet flushed deeply, but was silent, and if she felt displeasure did not manifest it. Servants were carrying about coffee and curaçoa, and Leslie Wilmot himself came up from the cabin, bringing Miss Meredith’s coffee-cup in his own hand, and offering it to her with a laugh at his awkwardness in spilling half its contents into the saucer.

“Thank you,” returned Violet icily, “but I prefer a neater cup.—Mr. Morton, please get me some coffee.”

Leslie stared a little, then decided that he had been clumsy and stupid, so good-naturedly forgot the slight and looked about for a place on Violet’s cushion for himself. Something in his flushed, tanned face and his familiar manner vexed Miss Meredith. “Why do you sit down here?” she asked coldly. “Mr. Morton and I

were conversing. Go and talk to your other guests.”

“Why, Pansy,” retorted Wilmot heartily, “I haven’t said a word to you yet since you came on board. Don’t send me away. I want a good look at you.”

“I told you, Leslie, that you were interrupting my conversation with Mr. Morton.”

Something in her tone and glance aroused even Wilmot’s sluggish imagination, and he sprang to his feet. “The devil I am!” he muttered in a passion. “It is always Mr. Morton, Mr. Morton, Mr. Morton; and what becomes of the man you are engaged to?”

“I think,” said Violet with an air of open disgust, “that you might have the good taste to spare me such a scene, Leslie. I know quite well that you have taken too much wine.”

He turned pale and looked hard at her. “You are very strange to me of late, Violet,” he murmured in a low voice. “I suppose it is hardly the thing for a fellow like me to quarrel with your good taste. I have not yet had too much wine, but, by Jove, now I will!” And he went down to the cabin with a set face.

Morton brought Violet’s coffee after sweetening it and adding curaçoa with his own hands, but she was talking to somebody else and ignored his civility.

## CHAPTER XI.

FRANK LAYTON was at the wharf next morning two hours after sunrise, and, unmooring a skiff, jumped in and rowed rapidly toward the Pansy, which had dropped a mile down the bay. He was soon on her deck, where he found that an air of activity prevailed, indicating preparations for a cruise. Leslie’s man came up the companion-way, and in answer to Frank’s inquiries said that his master was still in bed and would see no one.

“He will see me,” returned Frank. “Go and tell him I am following you;” and, presently entering the state-room, he found Wilmot still in his berth.

He was awake, and stretched out a

little brown hand. "You're a good fellow, Frank," said he in a choked voice, "but I didn't expect to see you for some time to come."

"I woke early," returned Frank smiling, "and it occurred to me that it would be just like a certain young fellow, who was sure to have a headache this morning, to give us the slip and put out to sea. A yacht is a deuced convenience at such a time. I feel rather responsible for you, my dear boy. I'm a considerably older man than you: I know a good deal about young men's follies, and I want you to treat me like a brother and let me help you if you are unhappy;" and he put his hand into Wilmot's and looked down kindly into his face.

Leslie started up with a sort of howl, then presently burst into tears. "You're a good fellow—the best fellow in the world," he gasped, "and I'm—I'm an awful fool."

"Very likely," said Frank. "When one is sick away from home, it's lonesome having none of one's own flesh and blood by one's bedside. I had a fever once in a little out-of-the-way Italian village: a hideous old woman used to give me my medicine and broth, and I often felt so babyish I wanted to put my arms about her neck and kiss her; but she smelt abominably of garlic, and really I was not brave enough, so I got well finally without yielding to my inclination."

Leslie laughed. "I know," he exclaimed, his laugh suddenly turning into a groan: "I wanted to see my mother this morning."

"I told Thomas to bring some coffee," observed Frank, "and here it comes. Now, Leslie, get up and take a cup with me;" and within five minutes the two men were sitting opposite each other at the table in the cabin, Frank calm and easy as ever, Leslie huddled into a costly dressing-gown, his face flushed and his eyes full of uneasy shame.

"Tell me, Frank," he whispered, leaning his elbows on the table and burying his face in his hands, "did I disgrace myself awfully last night? I can't remember much about it."

"To my mind," said Frank, "being drunk is a disgrace, and its consequences are not so contemptible as the condition. But you behaved badly enough to be thoroughly disgusted with yourself. Still, take comfort in one thing: nobody saw you but Maurice and myself. As soon as we learned how things were going, we frightened the ladies by a prediction of a thunder-shower, and the party broke up in too much disorder for anybody to miss you."

"But Mr. Layton saw me," gurgled Wilmot. "What did he think of me?"

"I didn't come to preach," returned Frank, "nor to tell you that anybody thought badly of you. You have been a fool, and now I am sure you repent your folly, and determine to hold by your manhood in future. I hope this is not your habit. I should be sorry to think that you take pleasure in excesses. Be candid with me now, although if you confess you are often drunk I shall be grievously disappointed in you."

Leslie hung his head. "I'll say one thing for myself, Frank," he answered after a pause: "such a thing never happened before when there were ladies about—on my honor, now. I'm not such a beast as that. But I haven't lived with men like you," he went on, rubbing his fists into his eyes, "and I've just been a jolly fellow among jolly fellows. I know it was a beastly shame for me to behave so, but I was all right until Violet looked at me with such infernal scorn. That just woke up the devil in me."

"What's this? Have you and Violet quarreled? I want to hear all about it."

"I'm ready to tell you," said Leslie sullenly. "It is not very good form to tell tales of women, but it's high time I understood matters. Violet Meredith is the handsomest and best-bred woman in England—God bless her!—but she has not acted fairly by me since I came to America."

"She is my cousin, and very dear to me," observed Frank succinctly. "You must answer to me for any accusation you make against her."

Leslie stared. "Look here, Frank," he exclaimed, "you must know what

every man in London says about her. Why, when I first got spoony on her account, half of our fellows warned me to look out, for that she was the most devilish coquette in the kingdom. I beg your pardon, Frank, but half a dozen swore they knew everything about the way she treated Harcourt—how she played with him until she made him wild, then flung him over and let him go to the devil. Then there was a host of others quite as bad, except that they were already too far on the broad road to be hurt by her. Indeed, they assured me she had no more heart than a stone, but made men infatuated with her just from a deadly love of amusement. I never believed 'em. I've heard men talk, and I know that when a woman hurts their confounded pride they comfort themselves by telling plenty of lies about her. Well, she accepted me. I wanted her to be married at Easter, but no, she was not ready. I gave her until October, although I saw no propriety in the delay, for every newspaper was trumpeting 'an affair in high life,' and I felt like a fool. Now, Frank, you know the sort of man I was before I became engaged. I wasn't brought up strictly: I had more money than I could spend wisely, so I spent it foolishly. On my soul, I wish I hadn't. But it was too late for me to do more than mend my ways. Pansy has had nothing to reproach me with since the day she promised to marry me." Frank nodded. "She was never very kind to me," pursued Leslie. "But I never expected much more than toleration from her: I'm not the sort of fellow to inspire devotion in a handsome woman. What am I beside her, so beautiful and clever as she is? But she accepted me, and it was natural to believe that she liked me a little. I would have kissed the floor she trod on: when she has not let me touch her hand I have played spoony over the flower she has worn. That's the way I have loved her," he said in a choked voice. "It may be it's a dog's love, but it is the feeling I have for her. I would be content to have her go into the world and be courted and worshiped; she might spend my money

like water to give her pleasure; I know that a gay life would be merely her amusement—that it could not fill her heart—that she would turn to something plain and true, sure to be hers whatever happened. I could be that to her, and perhaps something more." He paused again.

"Go on," said Frank.

"Well," resumed Wilmot, "then came her freak of visiting the States, and I followed her here. I was afraid she would not like it, but she seemed glad to see me. I brought her those opals she wore yesterday, and when she put them on she kissed me of her own accord;" and he flushed deeper than ever. "She had never been so kind before. In fact," he went on more hastily, "she has been cordial enough at times; but, Frank"—here Leslie's hand tightened around Frank's arm as he looked imploringly into his face—"why is she so possessed about that fellow Morton?"

"He is an old friend, once her tutor."

"Oh yes, I know all that, and that she had a childish love-affair with him. That is none of my concern. Only her present and future belong to me. What is he to her now?"

Their eyes met, and Wilmot's glance was keen and suspicious enough.

"On my honor," said Frank, "I believe them to be nothing to each other but the merest good friends."

Leslie shook his head. "He is madly in love with her," said he slowly; "and, what is more, Violet encourages him."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Frank, "you're jealous."

"Of course I am. Nevertheless, he is in love with her, and from some reason or other she fools him to the top of his bent. She is generally very particular to have the men about her well born and bred, no matter what their other virtues are; but Morton is a literary man, clever no doubt, but with no antecedents, so far as I ever heard, and all my acquaintances in London consider him rather a cad."

"He is my intimate friend," remarked Frank.

"Excuse me: I do not wish to say one word against him. Heaven knows he is

a handsomer man than I, and a cleverer and a better one, but, for all that, he is not just the sort of man Violet has been used to all her life. However, that makes no odds to me: I am no snob, and think aristocracy about played out. But Violet has long talks with him, and always alone: before others they barely speak. There are certain songs she sings to him, and only to him: he reads to her—he—he offers all those ten thousand little services which it pleases a man so to be allowed to perform for a handsome woman, and when I asked her to take *my* arm, to let *me* wrap her cloak about her, to let *me* button her gloves, she is regularly bored and says, 'Engaged people do not pay each other attention, *cela va sans dire*.' But I contend that it all does not go without saying. When a man is married his wife has yielded him so much that he can afford to draw back and allow others to enjoy his minor privileges—dancing with her, putting her in the carriage, and so on. But I'll be hanged if I don't think that when a man is only engaged he wants his attentions received more cordially than those of outsiders."

Frank was silent for a moment; then spoke with an effort: "Violet is a born coquette, Wilmot: you had better make up your mind to that."

"But do you think she cares for me?"

"On my soul I do. She told me she had never been so contented as since her engagement to you—that she felt at peace and sure of a happy future."

"Did she, though?" exclaimed Leslie with a break in his voice. He mused a little. "But you did not see the look she gave me last night. By Heaven, she seemed to loathe me. She had smiles for Morton, kind words for Morton, but with my jewels on her breast, my flowers in her hands, my engagement-ring on her finger, she would not even tolerate me near her; but—"

"I know, my boy, I know," interposed Frank. "But I am certain she is sorry for it by this time."

"I will give her a chance to enjoy Morton's intellectual conversation unchecked," pursued Leslie violently. "Meanwhile, I will go off on a week's cruise,

and get drunk every night, that she may have the satisfaction of knowing I am the beast she thought me yesterday."

"You will do nothing of the sort," cried Frank: "you will dress and go home with me to breakfast."

But Leslie's brow contracted stubbornly. "No, I shall not see Violet for a fortnight at least. I am going to send for Major Ogden and his cousin, and by eleven o'clock to-day we shall be thirty miles away. When I get ready to come back, I will ask Miss Meredith what her views are regarding our engagement. I don't mind some bitter with the sweet, but I've had all the bitter and no sweet quite long enough."

"If you are determined on a cruise," said Frank smiling, "let me have a berth. Why could we not go to Newport? I can give you plenty of pleasant introductions there. I am longing to see Newport, but if you prefer the Ogdens—"

Leslie brightened up. "I would rather have you than any man alive," he cried heartily. "I don't go in for neat speeches, Frank, but I'd like you to know that I never before saw a man who was so completely a good fellow, at the same time that he never ceased to be a splendid gentleman."

All Frank's arrangements for a fortnight's absence were made when an hour or so later he entered his brother's room at the cottage. Maurice was writing, and looked up startled.

"What has happened?" he asked. "You look as if you were going on a journey."

"So I am," returned Frank with a rather melancholy laugh. "I start for Newport with Wilmot in the Pansy at half-past ten."

"What on earth is the meaning of that?" demanded Maurice curiously, his mind reverting instantly to his brother's love-affair. "You don't mean to tell me that you have offered yourself and been refused."

The blood rushed to Frank's face. "You're as bad as I am, Maurice," said he laughing. "But don't treat me like a boy who has but one thought in his head. Miss Clairmont has not refused

me yet: I am not running away from her. But Violet has been playing her old games with Wilmot, and unless we take some pains her engagement will be broken off. Leslie is stubborn enough in his resolution not to see her for a fortnight, and was going to take those army-men on a cruise. But they are such a bad lot there is no telling where their influence would carry him. It's a trial, of course, leaving you all, but I think it better to take care of him until his trouble with Pansy blows over."

"It is very good-natured of you, Frank, but is it worth your while to keep a fool out of the folly he must indulge in?"

"Leslie is not the fool you think him. Besides, it is always worth the while of an idle man like me to put out his hand and keep his brother from falling. God knows, most of us need a little help sooner or later, and this boy is easily guided. Maurice, I want you to undertake the ungracious task of telling Morton that his attentions to Violet are not only unacceptable to her family, but an insult as well. Leslie can't hear his name mentioned without getting in a passion."

"It is Violet who deserves scolding. Morton merely obeys her caprices."

"Scold Violet by all means," said Frank, looking at his watch. "She is going to breakfast with me now, and I shall give her my opinion upon her behavior. Well, good-bye, old fellow!" The two men grasped each other's hands and exchanged long glances. "I'm awfully sorry to go," said poor Frank.

"I'm disgusted at any necessity for your doing so. You'll see Miss Clairmont first, I hope."

"You need have no doubt of it."

Violet was waiting for Frank in the breakfast-room in a delightful toilette, and with a manner which seemed the happy result of a conscience void of all knowledge of offence committed. Nothing could be more airy than her spirits, nothing more bewildering than the sportiveness of her replies to his rather severe accusations. Frank found himself laughing at her wit in spite of his resolutions of severity, and her easy-going humor

almost persuaded him that there could have been no substantial reason for complaint against her except for levity. She laughed unmercifully at Morton and the idea of her entertaining a preference for him—laughed at everything, in fact; and when her cousin insisted on her sending a kind message to Wilmot, she ran into the garden, pulled a sprig of heliotrope, put it to her lips once and begged him to carry that to her lover.

"That is nothing but a foolish coquetish trick," said Frank, placing it in his pocket-book. "What possible satisfaction can there be for a sensible man in such a love-token as this?"

"I am sure I have no idea," retorted Violet, "but watch its effect upon Leslie. Yet very likely he is not a sensible man. You may not care for my kisses; still, if Miss Clairmont's lips had touched the flower she gave you, what then?"

"Nonsense!" cried Frank. "But I do care for your kisses, Pansy: give me one now;" and she allowed him that cousinly privilege with a laughing air. She was never in such good spirits as when she was doing mischief. How many lovers she had had before whom she had piqued, maddened, driven into revolt! They could not forget her, and could no more give her up than she could let them go, and presently they came back ready to submit and crouch at her feet for more of her kisses, blows, spurnings as the humor seized her.

Frank thought of all this as he went up the hill to bid Felise good-bye. He was a little bitter toward his cousin in his heart, although she was almost as dear to him as if she had been his sister, but he knew her so well, her thousand faults, her thousand charms. If she were lovely, was she not yet imperious, arrogant, light-minded, almost false? What weary unreasonableness her beautiful lips could express! She was not a woman for Frank's imagination to kindle over: loving her was an intoxication, an excess, a rich draught of passion it might be; but he was not the man to drain a cup into which, like the Eastern queen, he had melted his richest jewel. When he loved he wanted a guarantee for his future as

well as bliss in the present. He had striven all his life to be temperate even in desire. "Not too much," was his motto. Just now he was, as may be seen, irretrievably in love—passionately anxious to end his suspense and arrive at a complete happiness—yet since he must wait there lurked a fine pleasure even in his present uncertainty: there was so much to muse over, to consider, to adjust in his nice scale of possibilities, since he was certain they balanced favorably for his own hopes.

Frank found Mrs. Knight in her dining-room washing her fragile breakfast porcelain, and after making his adieux to her he went into the garden, where he came upon Felise sitting in the summer-house reading to Mr. Knight. She was at his feet, both his hands clasping hers as she held them up to him over her shoulders, her eyes fixed upon a great volume in her lap. Her uncle was the first to discover the intruder on this peaceful scene, and as soon as he heard that Frank had come to say good-bye he sauntered away abstractedly among the flower-beds, his hands folded behind him.

"I must go and get his hat, dear old man!" said Felise looking after him, and wishing in her heart he had not left her alone with this audacious lover: "he will be blinded by the sun and have a headache."

"No, indeed," cried Frank: "the sun is half obscured. Your concern is wasted on him. Show a little for me."

"But I do not like to hear that you are going away. I think it very dissipated and wild on your part."

"Confess that you are sorry."

"Oh no: I shall say nothing to flatter you. But, in truth, I do not know what we shall do without you."

"I will tell you what to do," observed Frank softly. "Think all the time of what I said to you yesterday."

"What did you say?" she asked with an apparent effort to remember. "You talked too much to let any one observation make any impression upon me."

Frank smiled significantly. "You have blushed over it a thousand times already,"

said he. "It is I who see your cheeks at present, mademoiselle. Now, Felise, tell me you are sorry I am going away. Don't begrudge me that consolation."

But she only laughed.

"I must say good-bye," he exclaimed with a sigh after a little pause. "Bid me good-bye, Felise."

She made him a distracting little curtsey. "Good-bye," she said smiling.

"Will you not shake hands?"

She extended both her hands, and he clasped them and drew them toward his lips.

"Oh no," she murmured, withdrawing them, a trifle embarrassed.

"You are very rigid in your ideas," cried Frank, not in the least repelled, for, after all, he did not expect permission to do as he liked with her little hands—as yet. And there was a tremulousness in the lowered lids of her eyes and the fitful color on her cheeks which assured him that this ice of maidenly reserve was so transparent as to allow him a delicious vista of some tumults of mind she was experiencing. "I think," he added very softly, standing very close to her and stooping to whisper in her ear, "that one little kiss upon your hands would do you small harm. Think how presumptuous I am. Some day, not very remote either, when you trust me a little more, I intend to kiss your hands unforbidden by you."

"Oh no!"

"More than that—your forehead too."

"Oh no!"

"Even your cheek, Felise."

"Oh no! oh no!"

"More yet," said Frank with a sly smile at her hauteur, at which he was quite undismayed, "but I should not venture to put that supreme happiness in words, for fear of being struck by lightning on the spot. But I shall do it nevertheless. Now, Felise, dear Felise, one kind little word and I am off."

As Frank drove to the dock his scale of possibilities balanced so creditably on the side of his hopes that he was almost glad to be going away, since parting had given him an excuse for an interview like this.

## CHAPTER XII.

AFTER his brother's departure Maurice felt inclined to go up and look after the welfare of Miss Clairmont, and experienced a glow of virtue when he put that temptation behind him and wrote on a political question all the long morning instead.

"I will give her a chance to feel lonely and pine after poor Frank," he said to himself every time he turned a fresh page; and when, on going down to luncheon at half-past one, he heard that Mrs. Meredith and Violet and Morton had spent the morning with her, listening to her singing, he was inclined to be aggrieved.

"Quite a musical morning," remarked Violet. "Felise sang enchantingly. I constantly expected that you would drop in, Maurice. In fact, my particular reason for going to Mrs. Knight's was that I might have the pleasure of seeing you: I never have five minutes of your society here except at dinner."

"Well, then," said Maurice, helping himself to cold chicken, "suppose we have a ride this afternoon, and you shall enjoy my intellectual society to your heart's content. It is a long time since we rode together, Pansy."

Violet flushed deeply.

"Miss Clairmont will dine with us," observed Mrs. Meredith. "Can you think of any proper man, Maurice, to make a sixth at the table?"

"Invite your profound friend, Mr. Knight, mamma."

"I thought of that, but I cannot ask him without his wife, and she would make it a party. But how I do love to talk to Mr. Knight!"

"What on earth do you find to talk about?"

"We talk about the glacial period and drift, deposits and evolution. He was telling me only this morning about the kitchen-middens in Denmark. Now, I like a man who can talk about kitchen-middens. There is nothing commonplace about such a subject."

"I should fancy not," remarked Violet dryly. "Pray let us hear what they are, mamma."

"I am charmed to be able to tell you. About thirty thousand years ago—"

"Thirty thousand years!" cried Morton. "Spare my scruples, Mrs. Meredith: I'm an orthodox man myself."

"Very well. The most alarming figures are consistent with the Bible record now-a-days. Call each day of Genesis a period of a few million of years. Save your scruples, be orthodox, and let mamma proceed."

"Well," resumed Mrs. Meredith, "about thirty thousand years ago a race of men existed in Denmark who must have eaten with the most magnificent appetites, for the bones of the animals they devoured made huge piles which are still to be seen, and which are called kitchen-middens: why, Heaven and perhaps Mr. Knight know. I confess I forgot to ask the meaning of the name. Now, you dig into these remains and you find the little hatchets of the pre-historic man, and also— Oh, you find quantities of droll things, which, if you have a logical mind, thoroughly convince you about all sorts of theories. Now, is not that original?"

"Oh, very: so fascinating too! What else did he tell you?"

"We usually discuss evolution," returned Mrs. Meredith solemnly, drinking tea all the time. "I was quite ready for him there, as I had read all about it in a French book, and was delighted with the idea that we had all been fish and wriggled, and monkeys and hung on trees by our tails, and little dogs and bitten people's calves. It seemed to me very reasonable, and I quite doted on the belief that if we wanted wings, and accordingly went about selecting our husbands and wives with a view to their having a peculiar formation of shoulder-blades, our remote descendants would finally be able to fly. It was quite clear in my own mind, but Mr. Knight considers my ideas rather too advanced. He says that the feminine mind revels in deductive theories, and regards facts as too precise and empirical, but that I may safely go as far as this in declaring that steady developing changes have resulted in the present system of things, and that

there exists sufficient evidentiary proof that the general always comes before the special, and that specialization is probably not yet exhausted. Now, is not that delicious? Not precisely clear, you know, but so profound! Is it not droll for me to have got hold of such clever opinions?"

"Very," sighed Violet. "Won't somebody else say something learned? It's painful to have to listen to it, yet it gives me a thrill of pride to move in circles where the highest intelligence prevails."

"I knew something once about a saurian," said Morton, "but, on my word, I've forgotten it."

"Maurice," cried Violet, annoyed by her cousin's abstraction, "what makes you so silent of late?"

"I was thinking," he blandly remarked, "that it is a very curious historical fact that Rome was saved by the cackling of geese."

"I am not sure what rudeness you mean by that, but the moral of the story is that a little folly is occasionally good for men.—Mamma, why is it my admirers never give me any ideas? They only talk to me about myself."

"It must be a tremendous bore," said Maurice rising: "I rarely afflict you in that way."

"You never speak to me at all. If you did, I suppose you would talk saurians or some other monsters at me. You would not tell me of yourself—your hopes, your ambitions."

"Would I not? Depend upon it, Pansy, every man loves to talk about himself. But I am wise enough not to do it except to a woman who has too little vanity to sacrifice my earnestness to her egotism. Most of us when we address your sex, being anxious to please you, talk to you about yourselves, and achieve success."

"You may be anxious to please, but as to your pleasing us, *c'est d'autre chose*. Most of us have for our ideal the old-fashioned hero, who could say less but feel more than the silver-tongued wooers of to-day. It is not so much what one says as what one feels that makes the charm even of a flirtation."

Morton left the cottage as soon as he had lunched, feeling rather incensed that Maurice should have spoiled his afternoon by arranging a long ride with Miss Meredith. Yet he ought to have been glad of a chance to work, for his novel had lagged in its interest for him of late, and required every moment of his time for the next two months if he was to fulfill his engagement. Mrs. Meredith finished her tea, and took her favorite sofa and the latest magazines, and went fast to sleep in five minutes. Maurice sat down in the hall for another look at the papers, and became at once so absorbed that he forgot his engagement, and Violet came down dressed for her ride and stood beside him for some moments quite unperceived, looking at him fixedly with some bitterness in her face. At last, tiring of the sight of his frowning brows knit in wrath over some opposition leading article, she drew off her gauntlet and put her white hand on his shoulder.

"The horses have come round, Maurice," said she.

He looked up and smiled in her face, then turned his head and kissed the warm, soft hand. "I had quite forgotten," said he. "How handsome you are in your habit, Pansy!"

She flushed, and her face lit up with the joy of a glad child, but she drew her hand away and said nothing. Maurice cast a despairing glance at his unfinished column, and felt inclined to ask a half hour's grace, but finally decided that he must attend to his cousin. Accordingly, he bounded up stairs and returned in five minutes ready for his ride. Violet waved away the groom who offered to mount her, and accepted her cousin's services instead. He watched her admiringly as she settled herself in the saddle with a single movement which perfectly adjusted dress, whip and reins.

"I remember your admirable horsemanship," said he, springing into his own saddle. "You do a great many things remarkably well, but nothing better than you ride. The point of success with you is that you understand a horse."

"Yes, three species of creatures I un-

derstand—horses, dogs and men. Cats and women I can do nothing with.”

“I always doubt any woman’s knowledge of men, but I think you know something of the traits of a horse, unlike the rest of your sex, who have faint appreciation of the animal’s points provided he rears delightfully and holds his head high. But how constantly you make these stinging speeches, Pansy! Is there no woman in the world of whom you are fond?”

“Yes, I admire and love mamma, and sometimes even Miss Clairmont.”

“Only at times you love Miss Clairmont?”

“Only at times. I am envious of neither her youth nor her beauty, but yet—” something in her tone made Maurice turn to his cousin, who looked straight before her—“it is hard to see another gaining easily the sweet and beautiful prizes of which I despair.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Maurice, puzzled, yet realizing that some meaning personal to himself was hidden behind her words.

“Let us ride fast,” answered Violet inappositely. “Can we not gain that high ground? It is so warm here among the trees.”

They rode fleetly on for two miles or more, and gained the hills, which from the distance had been impurpled with midsummer iridescence. Not a word had been spoken. Maurice was as quiet as he looked, although his face had gained a little excitement from their exhilarating gallop. Violet studied his features now and then, as if she would gain a clue to his thoughts. She could never be alone with him but that any silence between them contained a weight of meaning for her, half awing her with a vague terror, half opening to her a vista of happiness full, for her longing woman’s heart, of the splendors of heaven itself.

She drew her rein presently. “Let us walk our horses,” she said. “This reminds me of home.” Maurice looked about him, smiled and shook his head. “Oh, I know it is different,” pursued Violet. “You have none of our cultivated picturesqueness here; still, that lane is

very like the one which leads up to Farmer Hopkins’s. Don’t you remember? It goes past the weir, and ends at the north gate of the park?”

“Yes, I see the resemblance now. We often took that way home when we had been to the Abbey.”

“I am glad you have not forgotten those days.”

“I have not forgotten them,” returned Maurice hastily, “but I rarely recall them. In fact,” he added more coolly, glad to gain a point where he could generalize, “after a man passes thirty-five, until he is sixty or more, he does not indulge himself in retrospection, for he has learned the value of the present moment.”

“Yet, Maurice, you have not forgotten your visit at the Grange?” Violet had turned so completely in her saddle that her cousin saw her full face flushed and tremulous with shining eyes.

“I recall it as I do a dream,” he answered coolly.

“A dream!” she cried passionately. “For me, at least, it was no dream. It was my season of youth and happiness, of hope, of infinite belief in the future. I am old now—not perhaps in years, but at heart—old, dreary, hopeless. I have valued nothing which has come to me since then. I have taken no real interest in life, merely keeping my place in the world, fighting to gain more love and admiration than other women have, while all the time the men who have seemed most to please me have been little more than lay figures who could pose themselves and talk. One memory of a different man has been so full of life that these creatures have been like apparitions compared with the thought of him; yet—”

Maurice stopped her with an imperious gesture. Her words humiliated him as they had humiliated him ten years before.

“My dear cousin,” he said gently, “let us remember the old times by all means, since you wish it. For my own part, I had the most delightful vacation after five years of hard work. As you suggest, we were both younger then, but you are a thousand times more beautiful than you were at eighteen: time has robbed you of nothing. I have no desire

to be any younger. Accordingly, what has either of us to forget? We are each almost on the threshold of married life, and marriage comes to us in a shape that ensures satisfaction, for both of us have some worldliness which—"

Violet interrupted him in her turn. "Something tells me," she exclaimed with a searching look into his face, "that you will never marry Miss Clifford."

Maurice stared at her in amazement. "Good Heavens! why not? What do you mean?"

"Because," she said with a cruel face and a sweet soft voice—"because you are in love with another and a very different woman."

He looked impassive. "Do you mean to hint that I am in love with you, Violet?" he asked with some sarcasm in his voice.

"That is ungenerous, Maurice."

"Forgive me, Pansy. Whom do you refer to?"

"You see her every day, Maurice."

He frowned darkly. "Your suspicion—well, no, I do not believe that you have any such suspicion," he said deliberately—"but your suggestion would affront me did I not remember that women, although more delicate than ourselves in some essentials, in others lack nicety of perception. A man would never utter such a treason before me: he would not dare to seem to disbelieve in my honor."

Violet burst out laughing.

"You were joking, then," observed Maurice tranquilly.

"Can you doubt it? Excuse me if my remarks were scarcely in good taste. You ought to forgive my careless words, Maurice, for you know, you alone know, why I am not a happy woman. Don't be afraid of me, however. I love you too well—of that I am quite aware: I love you so well that sometimes I hate you, and long to make you suffer. But a woman should be forgiven for feeling an unreasonable rancor toward a man who has not appreciated her regard. Should you actually fall in love with Felise, I think I could not survive it. You do not love Rosamond, but I can endure that you should marry her. I do not envy her: I can

even wish you both all sorts of happiness, both for this world and the next, for I do not believe your bliss here will jeopardize your rewards hereafter. Should you really fall in love— But, no: I am done. Well-tanned man of the world as you are, I embarrass you. Do not reply to me. As I said before, I am done."

She had stopped her horse, and even laid her hand on Maurice's bridle to detain him while she was speaking. Her voice had been tremulous, but such a look her cousin had never seen upon her face before. Her eyebrows were drawn together, her lips were stiff, her eyes dull and heavy-lidded. When she ceased a faint color suffused her cheeks and tears gushed to her eyes.

"Now let us go home," she cried with spirit. "It must be almost time to dress for dinner, and I would not miss making a toilette with care when Felise is to be near me. Ah, those young girls, Maurice—and, of all girls, those enchanting blondes—are so irradiated by Nature with all allurements that an old woman of the world like me requires to study her dress for hours before the glass in order to compare with them."

"Yes," said Maurice, drawing out his watch in just his usual manner, "it is almost five o'clock—quite time that we turned our horses."

They rode home with few words between them. Maurice had invited his cousin to ride with him in order both to withdraw her from Morton and to persuade her to discontinue her intimacy with him. But, on the whole, he had decided to put off that conversation until a convenient season, for to-day Violet's tactics seemed the reverse of defensive.

Miss Clairmont came to dinner at six o'clock, and found the people at the cottage all disposed to be dull and fault-finding with the wind or the weather or Frank Layton's absence. Mrs. Meredith had slept too long on her sofa with her lap full of serials. Morton had taken a solitary walk, and, having time to look certain questions square in the face, felt not altogether proud of the part he was playing in Saintford; Violet was in her most indifferent mood; and Maurice was like a

glacier. But a few words from Felise amused everybody so much that the low spirits of the party were quite dispelled. "It seems so lonely," she said with the frank regret of a child, looking about her, "not to see Mr. Frank Layton. I wish he had not gone away."

It would be hard to tell wherein lay the magic of these simple words to clear Maurice's brow and illumine Violet, for, after all, they were not so simple or true as they ought to have been. Felise, perhaps by way of silencing any self-accusations, had lately begun to consider that by and by perhaps Mr. Frank Layton would be more to her than any one else in the world. And since all this day she had not missed him at all, and since now, on coming to the cottage, she felt a presentiment of her usual happiness in Maurice's presence stealing over her, being a good little girl, she decided she must play the hypocrite and declare that Frank's absence impressed her sorrowfully.

"Miss Clairmont," exclaimed Maurice, unthawing at once, "that speech of yours is absolutely heartless toward the rest of us; yet, all the same, I will write it to Frank before I go to bed to-night."

"We all miss Frank," sighed Mrs. Meredith as they went out to dinner. "Felise, dear child, he is the perfection of a host, the only man I ever knew who spends a large portion of his income in entertaining his friends, yet does not repay himself by boring them. All other hosts expect you to talk to them when you are tired; they take you walks to show you views; they exult over some frightful pavilion they have erected after their own designs; they insist upon your listening to the history of the hideous family portraits: in short, they make you hate them with a deadly hatred."

"I agree with you, Mrs. Meredith," said Morton. "Do you know Angus? We were together a good deal in London, and when he asked me to go down to his place, I accepted with pleasure. But how awful he was! He had a prize pig, which he insisted upon my looking at twice a day. He had half a dozen bull-terriers and pups, who slept with him, ate with him, and kept me in terror of my

life, as they regarded me as their natural enemy. Then he was 'restoring' his church, and used to knock me up before daybreak to communicate some inspiration of mediæval style which had occurred to him during the night. After dinner he would say, 'Now, Morton, you're a literary man, and I want to know if this is so very bad;' and he would read his verses aloud until past midnight. In short, I couldn't stand it, and wrote to King to telegraph me that he was dead or something, so that I could go back to town."

"I have an ideal of a host," remarked Mrs. Meredith pensively, "which is very nice indeed. He should be dumb, but might have a frequent and pleasing smile; he should be something of an invalid, that his health might incapacitate him from trotting one about to show views and landscape-effects; he, as a simple matter of course, should prefer that dinner should be kept waiting to suit the convenience of his guests—that his engravings should be rolled and creased—the leaves in his rarest books turned down, and his horses lamed. But nothing should so perfectly please him as to have one take possession of his own sacred, peculiar, individual easy-chair by the fire in winter and the window in summer, and read his daily paper through before he has a chance to look at it."

"Frank ought to please you, mamma," said Violet.

"He does, he really does. He never bores me. Although boring has become such a fine art that it seems impossible for two people to be for ten minutes in each other's society without boring each other, Frank has never yet bored me. Still, he has not entirely settled down yet, and one never knows what dreary egotism lies undeveloped beneath a man's fine manners until he becomes a *père de famille*. Accordingly, let him be married for five years before I commit myself entirely in my judgment of his character.—Felise, dear child, have you ever been in Frank's library? I made a study of it this afternoon. I like to look quietly around where a civilized man has collected the things which he likes best.

Now, Frank is what I call a highly-civilized man."

In fact, it was the fashion to-night to talk of the absent host in a strain of panegyric, and every one said such flattering things that it might readily have been believed that Frank was a rich old man on his deathbed, with a fortune to bequeath to the one who praised him most. The ladies finally went into the library to look at his own particular belongings, and left Maurice and Morton together. Conversation lagged at once between the two gentlemen, who neither spoke nor smoked nor touched the wine. Maurice occupied himself over his papers and letters, and Morton lay back in his chair, his profile outlined against the crimson velvet cushion as he moodily stared out of the window.

"I am keeping you from the ladies, Morton," said Maurice after a long silence, suddenly looking up from his paper.

"Not at all," returned Morton.

"Take some more burgundy. I am nothing of a host: I do not realize that Frank is away, and that I am even nominally at the head of his house."

"Nothing more, thank you."

Maurice threw down his paper in front of him, and folding his arms upon it, looked fixedly at Morton. "What is it Shakespeare says?" he exclaimed abruptly: "'Every inordinate cup is unblessed, and the ingredient is a devil.'"

"I don't remember the precise words," said Morton savagely. Then rising he added, "Most of us know the truth of it from experience more or less bitter."

Maurice too sprang up, and put his hand on the other's shoulder. "Morton," he said with a commanding glance, "as gentleman to gentleman I have no right to say what I wish to say to you, but at times conventionalities are insignificant. We forget them when we see another human being in danger. As man to man I speak to you."

Morton may have quailed inwardly, but he did not flinch. "Say on," he returned: "I am listening."

"I do not know what hope is at the bottom of your interest in my cousin, but

I assure you that any man who puts himself in her power is at the mercy of a dangerous coquette."

Morton was pale as death. "Did Miss Meredith empower you to speak in this manner to me?" he asked in a low voice.

"No: we have not spoken of you. I had thought of warning her of the consequences of her actions, but not in reference to yourself. In this matter my solicitude is for an honorable man in the meshes of an entanglement little less than disgraceful—who is sure to awaken presently from an ardent dream to the knowledge that all that he supposed a warm, living, breathing reality is a cold deception." Morton had turned away, and remained obstinately silent. "The world is full of women," pursued Maurice, still in an inflexible voice, "to say nothing of the waste of feeling which devotion to the one you cannot marry implies: why not seek one who has a heart to give you, instead of one whose weary soul has long led her into a craving for excitement—for amusement at any cost to others. She can light fires which she can traverse in safety. I do not like to say this, but you command my esteem in other respects, and I should like to see you extricate yourself from a position which does you no credit. My cousin is engaged to Leslie Wilmot."

"Suppose," said Morton with a half laugh, "that I denied that she held to her engagement to him."

"I should say she had fooled you: that is all. I am not apt to intermeddle in other men's matters, but remember that Miss Meredith is under the roof of your friend, who for the time being is her guardian, and that her family sanction nothing in her conduct which interferes with her engagement to Wilmot. I have done: now we will join the ladies."

Morton looked proud and indifferent, and stood rooted to the spot as if plunged in thought.

"I hope," said Maurice in a kind voice, "that I have not angered you. Had I not a sincere interest in you, my words, harsh as they have been, would have been harsher."

"I am not angry," returned Morton:

"I have not enough self-respect left to be angry." He still stood as if he had forgotten where he was, and as if he had lost the power of action. Maurice again suggested that they should join the ladies, as coffee was to be served in the parlor.

"No," said Morton, his memory returning, "I will not go in. Tell them, if you please, that I leave Saintford early to-morrow morning for a few days. Make my excuses: I am not well. I will not tax their forbearance longer this evening."

Meanwhile, the ladies had passed on to the parlor. Mrs. Meredith took up a novel, Felise went to the piano, and Violet stood at the window and looked out. Rain had set in since afternoon, shadows of night were fast settling down, while mists, driven by the east wind, stalked in funeral fashion over the grounds. Moralists have always had a favorite theme in the unsatisfyingness of human lives. From Bossuet, with his "*On trouve au fond de tout le vide et le néant*," down to the simplest writer, the idea is repeated with endless and hopeless iteration. Often as it is declared aloud, how much oftener does this conviction sit like a spectre in our hearts and brood over our lives! As Violet looked at the gray-shrouded earth and listened to the melancholy strains which Felise played fitfully, she felt weary and hopeless. The past was hideous, the present tantalizing, the future worthless. She was angry with herself for her outbreak to her cousin, yet said within her heart, What harm had it done save to show her more clearly than before the fact of his utter indifference to her regard? She had been drifting of late into an intimate intercourse with Morton, which had not been without its enjoyment for her. Now she was asking herself why it would not be better for her to give up Wilmot, who was nothing to her, for Morton, who at least had the merit of a tried devotion, a heart to be absorbed in her, a mind capable of interesting her. She was weary to-night: the world was nothing, comfort and peace much. She had willed something once, but against her weak woman's resolution had interposed an insuperable obstacle, and her

will had snapped: she knew at last all her wishes to be futile. She was more of a woman in her defeat than she would have been in her success. Her demands upon life were less arrogant than they had been yesterday: she was disposed to content herself with half enjoyments—to be trustful and dependent. In fact, she was in a mood to promise immeasurable fidelity to-night to a man who loved her, and who had been, and would continue to be, true to her.

Luigi came in while she still stood staring into the gray twilight, and lighted the candles in their sconces and the great globe lamps in the chandeliers. Then he closed the shutters and drew the curtains, and Violet returned to realities.

"Is it night?" yawned Mrs. Meredith, who had fallen asleep. "I wish Frank were here: it is terribly dull without him, is it not, Felise? He is always doing something nice for one: Maurice is a bear in comparison."

"Maurice a bear!" exclaimed Violet. "Upon my word, mamma, you have no taste!—Do you not admire my cousin Maurice's manners, Felise?"

Felise stopped playing and looked at Violet with her frank yet subtle smile. "He is very distinguished," she answered softly. "He does grand things in a simple manner, but if he picks up one's handkerchief he does it in a grand manner."

"Frank's manners are better," insisted Mrs. Meredith. "He does everything simply—nothing seems difficult for him. He is always an immense favorite in society. I remember Lady Macdonald once asked me to take him when I visited at her place in Scotland. 'Do bring him,' she wrote, 'for Frank Layton has the knack of making everything go off well, from a ball to a powwow.'"

"Bless me, mamma! What praise from Lady Mac! But what is a powwow?"

"I don't quite remember, my dear, but I think it is another name for the American Congress."

Maurice came in with Morton's excuses, which Violet received with a heightened

color and an air of vexation. But coffee was served, and while they drank it Maurice told his aunt that he must go to Saratoga next day, and proposed that she and Violet should accompany him. The politicians were there in force, and he was sent for, and his aunt and cousin could be amused for a week, and be back in time for Frank's and Wilmot's return from Newport. Violet was delighted with the prospect of a week's change and excitement, and Mrs. Meredith, with an air of self-sacrifice, sent for her maid at once and bade her begin packing their boxes.

Felise felt a little dreary: for some reason she seemed all at once to be quite alone in the world. The others were talking incessantly. Maurice had heard from Miss Clifford, who had been to the mountains, but was now in Newport again, and it had occurred to him that Frank would not be backward in inviting her to return with him to Saintford. Secretary Clifford was at Saratoga for a day or two on his way back to Washington: in short, Maurice's horizon, which of late had seemed no larger than Felise's, suddenly embraced a whole world of imperious interests and widely-diverging energies. Her heart sank: what was she, after all, to these people? If Frank were here, she would not be outside of everybody's hopes and interests. Her lip quivered, and she turned to the piano and began playing softly to herself.

"Sing me something, Miss Clairmont," Maurice said suddenly, leaning down to her—"sing me something sad and sweet." Felise sang something very bright and gay on the contrary, then repented and gave him a pathetic old ballad. "Go on," said he when she stopped. "I want to hear 'Allan Percy' and 'Auld Robin Gray' and 'Kathleen Mavourneen.'"

She obeyed him meekly enough: she was suffering to-night, without having yet defined the reason, and all her passion of pain and longing found expression in her voice. Maurice leaned back in his chair listening, and looking at her through his half-closed eyelids, and a shimmer of magnetic light there showed that he heard her not altogether unmoved.

"Don't sing any more of those dreary

ballads," cried Violet finally: "sing 'Ernani involami.'"

But Felise declared she was tired and could sing no more, and began playing one of Strauss's waltzes. Violet held out her arms to her cousin, and he sprang up and they moved away to the luxurious strain. Felise was in a reverie, and did not at first see that they were dancing, but she soon turned sharply. "Does Mr. Layton waltz?" she asked suddenly.

"Is that so very surprising?" demanded Violet, laughing. "Maurice waltzes, but rarely. When he does, Heaven help the other men! The woman with whom he waltzes once will never waltz again without a sigh for him."

"No, I don't waltz now-a-days, Miss Clairmont," said Maurice. "The days when I considered dancing the highest employment of enlightened beings were over before I was twenty. But I confess I love waltzing still, particularly with Violet, who is the best dancer in the world."

Felise could not withdraw her eyes from the two. Maurice's arm was still around Violet's slender waist, and her face, vivid with color and lit with pleasure, was raised to his.

"Don't flatter me," said she. "I know very well how little you care about your tiresome, *passée* old cousin."

He stooped his head and kissed her. Felise shivered at the sight of the caress, and if they had observed the expression of her eyes at that moment, they would have been startled at their melancholy fire. She turned pale, then rosy red, and, wheeling on her music-stool, continued the waltz from the bar where she had broken off.

"Aunt Agnes," remarked Maurice demurely, "I kissed Violet, and have shocked Miss Clairmont. Tell her, please, that my cousin is the only sister I have in the world, and that she was so irresistibly handsome and her face so near me that I thought it as well to make the most of my privileges."

But Mrs. Meredith was watching Felise with the keen glance of a woman whose suspicions are suddenly aroused. "We forgive you," she observed carelessly. "But, Maurice, I will only for-

give you on consideration that you sing me some of the songs you used to sing to us at home—those you sang as a boy to poor Louise."

"Yes, I will sing," cried Maurice. "I feel inspired to sing to-night. Has Frank sung to you, Miss Clairmont?"

"No," returned Felise, without raising her eyes: "I did not know that he could sing."

"Frank can do everything," returned Violet. "But he has a horror of being called a musical man. Yet his voice has been compared to Mario's."

But Maurice was looking at Felise. "What is the matter with you?" he asked her with concern. "Did I tire you making you sing so long?"

She disclaimed all possibility of fatigue, and said she was only chilly, yet while Maurice was wrapping her in a shawl her cheeks all at once blazed with color. "I will get you a glass of wine," said he, staring at her, but she was absurdly shy and distant, blushing furiously all the time, and begged him to sing and not look at her any more.

He sat down to the piano and struck the chords with a firm hand. "Remember," said he, "it is almost twenty-five years since I used to sing to my mother: I have never learned a song since. The modern quality of my music will not be its fault."

He sang "Believe me if all those endearing young charms," and Mrs. Meredith did not once remove her eyes from Felise while she listened.

"She loves him," she was saying to herself—"she loves him."

Maurice turned to Felise when he closed. "That was my mother's favorite song," said he: "my father had sung it to her in her youth."

Violet saved her the necessity of speaking. "No man could love like that," she observed. "Yet that is the love a woman needs to make her happy."

"Oh yes," cried Maurice, smiling as he looked at Felise's downcast eyes, "many men could love like that."

"Love has its day," pursued Violet, "but then how soon a day passes! A man's love goes through many stages, but it finally reaches disenchantment, let Moore write pretty verses as he may."

"Now, Miss Clairmont," said Maurice, "I will sing you my favorite song. There are just two love-songs in the world—this and 'Che faro senza Euridice?'"

He sang the *Adelaide*. His was no elaborately trained or technically perfect voice, but it was mellow, thrilling and full: then, in whatever he undertook, expression was easy to him, and, a natural singer as he was a natural orator, he could move the feelings of his listeners at his will. To-night he was in a mood of exaltation beyond himself, and some inward thought or inspiration made him glad of a chance to spend his soul in music.

"Adelaide!" The strain pealed forth with all the passion of his nature in its tone. "Adelaide!" It passed beyond mere melody, and became a revelation of passion and of pain.

Mrs. Meredith crept up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Maurice," she whispered, "never dare to love anybody like that."

He moved her from him gently, rose and closed the piano.

"Sing one more song," pleaded Violet.

"It is my last song," said he wearily. "Song belongs to youth: I shall never sing again."



## PART IV.

### CHAPTER XIII.

MORTON was absent two days, then returned, and was overwhelmed with surprise to find the cottage empty of its summer inmates. Mechanically, he went to call upon Miss Clairmont, whom he found practicing new music indefatigably. "This is a change," said he: "I had no idea the Merediths were going away."

"They will return next week."

Morton questioned Felise a little more, then sat down and begged her to go on with her music. The quiet room reminded him of the days of early summer when he first came to Saintford: then the tranquil air of the place had seemed to him just what he needed of calm and peaceful influence to set him to work at his novel and to put him at his best. All his surroundings had been propitious: even his old love of poetry and romance returned, and the old magic, the old dreams of his more hopeful days, worked within him. He had felt sure that if he had genius it was to yield its results now. Little enough had he done: he had lived in a tumult of wild thoughts and wishes. Quickly all the fairy-land of blissful romance had vanished from his fancy, and instead of sitting down quietly to write out what he felt and thought, he had been devoured by restlessness, an insatiable desire to drown thought, reason and all higher truth with wave after wave of excitement. He had gone away from Saintford recently sick in body and soul: he had come back irresolute. He was both bound to Violet and separated from her by a gulf which of late had seemed to grow wider and wider. It was almost a relief to discover that she was no longer within easy reach of him: he was not yet obliged to make up his mind as to his future course toward her.

So he sat listening to Felise while she practiced. The influences of the room quieted and almost cheered him. It was

full of fresh flowers, and through the open lace curtains he could see glimpses of sunlight and waving shadow without: here Felise's dainty elegance seemed to have impressed everything. Morton was not used to domestic women, and the sight of the young girl's workbox full of little gold implements, lying by a pile of narrow laces with which she had been trimming frills, stirred a feeling of vague pleasure. One could find peace in loving this young girl. Her interest in life was fresh and sweet: she had no weariness, no ennui to combat the moment she was alone and excitement failed her. He looked at her well as she sat at the piano, and tried to think what she was in the minds of the men who had already loved her, and decided that the thought of her to them must be like a perfume, a melody, a ray of light—any emblem of a beauty which comes from the purest source of beauty.

Loving Violet Meredith was quite another sort of passion. Morton in all his life had loved but one woman. With most men it is with love as with the religions of the world—the active faith of one age is but the poetry and tradition of the next: in love the early transport is but a romantic memory to the older man, over which he is half cynic, half sentimentalist. But with Morton early love was still paramount: no weaker deities had displaced the god, and the remembrance even of this love for a girl of such affluent beauty and such brilliant caprices, both of mind and manner, made other women appear dull and lacking fascination. They might be beautiful, and their love might have infinite power to bless; yet all they could give seemed less than for Violet to fling him a swift glance, to allow him to touch her hand. In loving Violet there could be no weariness—none of the sweet satiety which is the sure accompaniment of love for a lesser woman. Life was worth living merely to have loved her: to lose the

world for such a woman would be giving dross for gold. So Morton had loved since he was twenty-four; and what had in youth been untried fervor was now changed into that demon of existence, an absorbing passion in middle life.

But Maurice's words and looks had stirred honest shame in Morton, and he cursed the infatuation which bound him in such degrading bondage that he could not look men in the face. In his short absence he had thought over everything Violet had said which he might count as a guarantee of her faith to him. What he wanted from her was a promise to become his wife. She had listened to his arguments again and again. She was away from England now: let her mother return home alone, while she stayed in this new country with her husband. She had not once said no, but she had never said yes. He had come back with the resolution of forcing a determinate answer: finding her gone, and with the words of Maurice still ringing in his ears, any ultimate happiness from his acquaintance with her became gradually, as the days went by, an impossible chimaera. In moments now when he called himself absolutely sane he held his infatuation for her cheap, since he found that in the presence of a very different girl he experienced an exquisite relief from all his doubts and dilemmas.

He saw Felise constantly now, for the Saintford circle seemed narrow enough, and although he visited frequently at Mrs. Dury's, there was an empressement in the manner of the widow which at times, although he was a modest man, dismayed him. But Felise and Mrs. Knight were delightful: the young girl opened up fresh vistas of imagination. Close upon thirty-six as he was, he had never before met a woman who completely pleased and amused him, beguiling the time without giving him intense shocks of feeling. To be with Violet and look at her superb beauty, meet her imperial glance, see her cross the room even, was to enjoy a rich banquet of sensation. The charm of Felise to Morton was like the delight one feels in coming upon a mountain-brook, in bending

over the beauty of a delicate woodland flower. She had the most powerful charm of youth: she could hold out bewildering allurements of pleasure, yet in his feeling for her could lurk no poison: he need not bear about with him the curse and the presence of a damnable doubt.

As for Felise, we may well believe that she thought little or nothing about Morton. Saintford was dull at present, and it was pleasant to have some one to entertain. Intellectually, they were sympathetic enough to find topics of talk without limit, but they did not always talk. Felise sang to him, as she had never sung yet even to the Laytons, song after song as one suggested another. Again, she would amuse herself by going through entire operas, filling out at times the thin piano sketch of orchestral accompaniment with a clever word of description. Morton had plenty of imagination which her music would arouse. These were pleasant days to him. Her grace and sweetness put his agitation to sleep: he was almost a boy again, lying on flowery meadows and watching peaceful clouds and tranquil sunshine. Felise was one person, then another, as she sang: Zerlina tripping across the fields, sad Norma, terrible Lucrezia, wavering, timid Lucia, or the lovely Linda. Sometimes higher strains than these, moved by earthly love or hate, tenderness or longing, jealousy or despair, would rise, and the flower-decked room would seem to swell into a lofty cathedral as she played and sang old masses: Morton could close his eyes and see lighted altars, swinging censers, stately pillared vistas, fretted arches, many-hued colors of the sunset gleaming through great rose-windows, while the melody, transubstantiated into strains of heavenly sweetness, soared above the white light of the myriad stars, a song of praise before the Eternal Throne.

One afternoon Mrs. Knight and Felise had given Morton the third seat in the pony carriage to go to the beach. They sat on the sands and watched the waves come in: an east wind was blowing and the tranquil Sound was tempest-tossed to-day. Above, floated great tremulous

white clouds, taking terrible shapes at times even in their fleecy beauty. Morton had been silent for a time, but suddenly exclaimed, "Do you ever read Heine, Miss Clairmont? Do you remember this?—

By the sea, by the desert night-covered sea,  
Standeth a youth,  
His breast full of sadness, his head full of doubtings,  
And with gloomy lips he asks of the billows,  
'Oh, answer me life's hidden riddle—  
The riddle primeval and painful—  
Over which many a head has been poring—  
Heads in hieroglyphical night-caps—  
Heads in turbans and swarthy bonnets—  
Heads in perukes, and a thousand others,  
Poor and perspiring heads of us mortals—  
Tell me what signifies man?  
Whence doth he come? and where doth he go?  
Who dwelleth among the golden stars yonder?  
The billows are murmuring their murmur eternal,  
The wind is blowing, the clouds are flying,  
The stars are twinkling all listless and cold,  
And a fool is awaiting his answer."

Morton looked at Felise and smiled bitterly as he concluded. "But no such questions haunt you," he said.

"I have been very unhappy sometimes," she replied. "But I take my trouble elsewhere than to the angry, turbulent sea. There are many questions which in this life we ask in vain, but the end of knowledge is not here."

These words were to produce an ineffaceable impression upon Morton. Felise was possessed as yet of too little self-consciousness to be very religious, but she possessed in a rare degree purity of feeling and an absolute faith that a beneficent God loves his human children. She might truthfully have said—

*À l'enfant il faut sa mère,  
À mon âme il faut mon Dieu.*

Morton lay awake all night thinking of the white soul which illumined her face while she spoke.

On the following morning Luigi came up from the cottage with the intelligence that Senator Layton and the Merediths were to return that evening, and Morton also brought the same news a little later. He found Felise in the garden making bouquets to send to the cottage, and she was hanging over the roses, heliotropes and lilies with lingering touches which seemed like caresses. Morton sat down on a bench and watched her: he was

haggard and pale, and seemed depressed. "You are glad they are coming back?" he observed to Felise, noticing a new light in her eyes.

"Oh yes, I am very glad; but," she added turning to him kindly, "you have made this week very pleasant."

"Is Frank Layton returning to-day?" he asked.

"No: they are still at Newport, and will not set out until the wind changes."

"Do you hear from him?"

"Yes," returned Felise simply: "he writes every day."

Morton started up and stood beside her. "Tell me something," said he hurriedly. "I have no right to ask, yet am anxious to know: are you engaged to Frank Layton?"

"No," returned Felise, raising her eyes quite unabashed. "But he is an intimate friend here, and he likes to have us know what he is doing."

Morton's face expressed relief, but he said no more until she had finished the bouquets: then he begged her to sit with him under the trees near the fountain for a few moments. "I have something very particular to say to you," he added with an averted glance.

Felise laughed at the formality of his request, but the stiff silence he maintained as they walked across the grass and the look of his face embarrassed her. He was very pale, but a spot of vivid color burned on each cheek, and his eyes were over-brilliant. She sat down and hurriedly pulled off her gloves and nervously clasped her hands together in her lap.

He turned toward her with a resolute smile. "Miss Clairmont," said he softly, "will you marry me?"

She uttered some inarticulate murmur, and half rose from her seat. Without his touching her, the motion of his hand compelled her to sit down again.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "you are not angry with me. Has not a man the right to ask the woman he loves to marry him?"

"But you do not love me, Mr. Morton."

He gazed at her intently as she sat leaning against the trunk of a tree, the

green leaves making a charming setting for the exquisite girl-face, flushed and half averted now. Morton was not altogether in love yet: he was no stoic, and felt her beauty deeply. "Do not say I do not love you," he said with a sort of quiver in his voice, "for I do love you dearly. I should be happy to be that flower in your hand, that leaf that touches your cheek." But she forbade the utterance of such folly by a single look and gesture. "Do I offend you," he asked hoarsely, "because you fancy my heart is in the possession of another woman?"

She blushed deeply and bowed her head. He started up abruptly, striding before her again and again. Finally pausing, he said, "She is a woman who only has power to do me harm: you can save me. If you once put your hand in mine, promise to be my wife, I will never think of her again." Felise would have spoken, but he went on hastily, with a sort of restrained fervor in his manner which made his words appear the inadequate expression of an overburdened soul: "I know that a woman has a right to claim the undivided affections of the man she marries. By Heaven, mine shall be yours! The memory of that other has lost all power over me. I will make you happy, Miss Clairmont. I am neither poor nor obscure. You shall have no common fate if you will marry me."

He had not finished, but Felise stopped him with a gesture, and looked at him with a womanly air which showed that her temporary dismay was over and that she had quite regained her forces. "Mr. Morton," she said with a peculiar smile, "your pleading is all very pretty, but let me speak for a moment: you have silenced me long enough. We may always be friends, but it is quite impossible that we should be anything more."

His face showed intense humiliation or disappointment. "You will not marry me, then?" he cried in a tone of despair.

"No, Mr. Morton."

"And why not? Miss Clairmont, I tell you that the happiness of my life depends upon you."

She regarded him with astonishment. "Why, Mr. Morton," she exclaimed,

"when did you first think of doing me the honor of asking this question?"

"Don't question me too closely," said he, "but do not doubt my motives." He spoke with such vehemence that she looked at him wonderingly: her eyes filled with tears at his tone, and they overflowed and ran down her cheeks. "I have alarmed you," he went on more quietly. "Let me tell you about myself. A year ago I had renounced all hope of personal enjoyment. I had ambitions to spur my energies, but my aspirations for happiness held nothing in common with them. I had decided that love was not for me: once I had tried to win the joys of other men, but I had made a miserable failure of my attempt. Now, all the current of my thoughts has changed. I long for quiet assured joys—something more tender than intellectual victories—something I need to rest on—something dearer, nobler than I have yet attained, or I am lost. Now, Miss Clairmont"—and by a terrible effort he forced his haggard features into a smile—"my love for you could ennoble my old ambitions, and with you for my wife the highest tasks which my career imposes would be easy for me."

Felise trembled as she listened. Had he held the power over her which some men exercise without inspiring love, his words would have revealed to her a command, and the inherent love of sacrifice which lies in the souls of all good women might have given her strength to obey it. As it was, his vehemence repelled her: he seemed an egotist, and women, the victims of egotists, abhor egotism.

"It seems to me," she returned doubtfully, "that to your mind marriage is not a very grave affair. Since you are so ready to love somebody, why not repay some woman who loves you?" She half smiled as she met his eyes.

He sighed. "I suppose," said he, understanding her allusion, "that in making you an offer I am too presumptuous. I might have known that yours is, for me at least,

Beauty too rich for use—for earth too dear.

Still, Miss Clairmont, it is a pleasure even

to be refused by you;" for his passionate mood had passed at the conviction of her indifference, and he at once put the graver significance of their talk behind him and determined to make her forget it.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

MAURICE'S trip to Saratoga with the Merediths was a successful one. The watering-place was crowded with his friends, and life for the ladies had been a brilliant and continuous fête, while he, on his part, held long talks about the country and the country's work, which rested of course on the shoulders of this coterie of statesmen and politicians who balanced expediencies and discussed their resources. Maurice was a favorite among his party: comparatively young, thoroughly in earnest, and possessing, besides high capacity, individual qualities both commanding and endearing, his seniors in office were devoted to him, for his enthusiasm was still fresh, and he had not yet felt the weariness of the everlasting battle, the perpetually-recurring experience of wasted energies and baffled hopes. Accordingly, his popularity, both political and social, had ensured his aunt and cousin a pleasant prominence at Saratoga, and they had thoroughly enjoyed their week, and returned in high spirits.

Morton renewed his old habits of intimacy at once, and paid his respects to the ladies the morning after their arrival at eleven o'clock. In spite of the lateness of the hour, they were still at breakfast, while Maurice amiably kept them company, sitting at a distant window reading newspapers. Violet greeted Morton with great cordiality, and at once began giving him a spirited account of their visit: she had met all the noted Americans, she affirmed, and their attentions had turned her head. Then they had come upon some English friends who had also been spending time in the States, and she had found plenty of opportunities for enjoyment. She mimicked the oddities she had met, laughed at the women and the young girls, re-

peated some clever man's bonmots and some idiot's absurdities, all with the object of amusing Morton, who would not smile, but continued to regard her with a fastidious air as he leaned over a chair and waited for her to finish her tea. When at last she became silent he turned to Mrs. Meredith. "And you, dear madam," said he, ignoring Violet, "I hope you had an agreeable time?"

"Oh yes: speaking by formula, I had an agreeable time. But I am an old woman, and neither Englishmen nor Americans are sufficiently spirituel to make love to an old woman. The next time I go into mourning and have a little leisure, I intend to write a book and call it *The Decline and Fall of a Woman's Empire*. Life contains no such elements of pathos as lie in the fact that a woman who has been beautiful and young reaches an age when her beauty and her youth are but a memory or a tradition—when she must be a looker-on where she has been chief actor. Alas! I am so bored in society sometimes!"

"I suppose," observed Morton, "that you will soon be leaving Saintford, Mrs. Meredith? When do you expect to return home?"

"We start on our journey to Niagara and Canada about the twenty-fifth," she returned, "and count on sailing for Liverpool some three weeks later."

"How large a traveling-party are you?"

"Frank and ourselves and Miss Clairmont make up the party."

"Mr. Wilmot does not go with you?"

"No," observed Mrs. Meredith languidly, but with some considerable meaning in her drawl. "Dear Leslie has some particular arrangements to complete in England before we return. He will sail in a fortnight now.—I shall have few more journeys with you, dear child," she added to Violet.—"Maurice, I wish you could go with us to Niagara."

"Thanks!" returned Maurice from behind his paper. "You will be better satisfied with Frank.—Morton, if you are ever so unlucky as to go about with women, you will be struck by the fact that they ask conundrums about everything they see. This last week it was always,

'Maurice, why is it that So-and-So does so-and-so?' A tremendous drain upon one's faculties!—Now, Frank, my dear aunt, will be just in his element traveling about with you, for he has spent his life revolving abstract questions among highly-cultivated beings, while I have been working among trivialities with the masses. You will never miss me, Aunt Agnes."

"It may seem very droll, but I rarely miss anybody. Just think, Maurice, how adorable Frank will be with Felise in the party! He will be nicer than if it were his honeymoon: nothing will be too much for him to do for us all. I intend to improve my chances, for I shall never enjoy such golden opportunities again.—By the way, Mr. Morton, when are you going home?"

"I cannot tell. I have, as yet, no disposition to revisit the fogs of my native land."

"Tell us the news, Morton," said Maurice. "You went away before us: how long did you stay?"

"Two or three days only."

"How did you amuse yourself in our absence?" demanded Mrs. Meredith. "I always feel so sorry for the place I have gone away from: I cannot help believing it to be a yawning void, sunless, rayless, spiritless. Did you write at your novel or did you make love?"

"I did not touch my novel."

"To whom did you make love—to Miss Clairmont or to Mrs. Dury?"

"I did not make love to Mrs. Dury: one never knows what one may do when a widow is concerned. Accordingly, I devoted myself to Miss Clairmont."

All three laughed.

"Allow me to suggest," said Mrs. Meredith, "that one never knows what one may do when Miss Clairmont is concerned. I suspect you fell in love with her."

Morton looked grave and a trifle disconcerted.

"Confess, now," cried Mrs. Meredith, "that you fell in love with Felise Clairmont."

Something in the glance which Violet flung at him decided Morton to commit

himself at once. It pleased him that she should hear that he too was free to amuse himself in the way most pleasant to him. "I am like every one else," said he with some bitterness in his voice. "Since you press the matter, I can only tell you that I went very much farther than was discreet for me, and that I am just now, Miss Clairmont's rejected suitor."

"I do not believe it," exclaimed Violet, the color leaping to her face.

"I should be the happiest of men if she had accepted me," rejoined Morton in his quietest way. "But it is really the case that I offered myself to that young lady twenty-four hours ago, and was refused."

A dead silence fell over the little party. Violet had grown white and rigid even to the lips, but her eyes blazed; Maurice looked impassive; while Mrs. Meredith was convulsed with suppressed laughter. Maurice threw down his papers presently and strode into the garden, and his aunt ran after him and caught his arm. It was a warm, sunny day after a night of light showers: a few white clouds still floated across the blue, but did not approach the sun, which shone brilliantly. The grass was still wet and aglow with gold and emerald gleams, the birds twittered joyously, and the refreshed flowers sent out rich perfumes. Mrs. Meredith's lawn skirts trailed a yard behind her as she walked along the garden-path, almost on tiptoe to rest her arm inside her nephew's. "Is not that droll?" she whispered, covering her face with a trifle of cambric and laughing immoderately. "Felise has stolen one of Violet's lovers at last! I wish her joy of him!"

"She did not care to keep him," fumed Maurice, angry that aspiring love should profane the goddess. "I call it no less than d——d impertinence for him to parade his presumption before us."

"He had an object in doing so: he wants to show Violet that he is not so much her slave as he has seemed."

"I told him," cried Maurice, "to go pay his addresses to some woman who was free to receive them, but I did not think that his aspirations were so high."

"High? He has been in love with Violet all his life: no wonder he thought he could throw his handkerchief in any direction he chose. I only wish he had offered to Mrs. Dury instead: Violet would not have been half so angry, and the widow has a real fondness for him, and would have accepted him."

"Aunt Agnes, it has been hard for me to understand why you have allowed Violet to encourage him and madden him by her coquettish tricks."

"Bah! She must have some one in love with her. It is her only amusement in life."

"On my soul," exclaimed Maurice, unreasonably angry, "I think men and women are fools!"

"I never doubted that," said Mrs. Meredith, growing suddenly grave. She looked into her nephew's face timidly, then played with a rose she put in his buttonhole. "Maurice," she began presently, with an effort at heroism, "I want to speak to you of a danger you are running yourself."

Maurice started, and Mrs. Meredith was conscious of an angry gleam in his eyes. He continued to look at her with an expectant glance. "Go on," said he in a sarcastic voice.

"I wish to speak about—about Miss Clairmont," faltered Mrs. Meredith. But Maurice's face grew so black she lost her courage. "You shall not look at me like that," she cried. "I tell you, you shall not! I am your aunt, and I will not be frightened out of life by my own nephew. Now, Maurice, smile—give me your hand."

"Please to go on. I have no intention of murdering you, say what you may," rejoined Maurice coldly. "You evidently approach the subject with so much terror that my mind is busy about the probabilities of your real meaning. You wish to speak about—Miss Clairmont."

"Maurice, I cannot be silent, although I dislike to say what I am about to tell you. You ought to be aware by this time that you were born not alone to govern men, but to please women. Frank is dearer to me than even my own children: he has been a comfort to me

when they were cruel and ungrateful. He is so good I want him to be happy."

"God knows, so do I!" cried Maurice in an agitated voice. "What do you mean?"

"He loves Felise with all his heart. Maurice, let him have her: do not come between them."

Maurice had turned frightfully pale: he was powerfully moved, yet his terror was vague and indefinite. "I come between them?" he repeated blankly. "I want him to marry her. I would tear my heart out before I would wrong Frank."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Mrs. Meredith soothingly. "Nobody suspects you of caring for her. It is no weakness of yours to be interested in women. The danger is quite the other way, for, Maurice, she loves you."

"Loves me!" he exclaimed mechanically. "Felise loves me! Impossible!" and he laughed.

"Hush! It is too heartless to laugh. I am certain that she loves you."

Maurice's heart beat hurriedly: he felt a wild sense of joy, but turned his face away from his aunt's eyes. "Give me your reasons for speaking," said he in a hoarse voice.

"I would not tell a different man, but with you I am certain there is no miserable vanity that such a story will gratify."

"I hope not—God knows, I hope not!"

Mrs. Meredith told him about their last evening together, when Felise had shivered and turned pale at the kiss he gave Violet—of her look and expression when he was singing.

"Perhaps," she pursued after a little pause of waiting for him to speak—"perhaps Felise has not yet defined her feeling for you even to herself. I only wish to put you on your guard: that is all. Rosamond will soon be here, and Felise will naturally understand the position of all parties. Then she will turn to Frank: she likes him—I am sure of that; but you—you have pleased her in a different way. Cannot you yourself recall a hundred innocent little follies which betrayed her fondness for you? I implore you, Maurice, break this off. Be indifferent, pre-

occupied, anything to estrange her from you."

Maurice lifted his aunt's hand and kissed it. "I am not sure whether you have done well in telling me this," said he gently, "but I thank you for your good intentions toward Frank at least, dear little woman! I must go in, for I was about to write to Rosamond that I hope, if she finds Leslie's yacht comfortable, she will agree to Frank's proposal and return with him."

He spoke in just his ordinary way, and let Mrs. Meredith study his face as she might she could read no expression there save an imperative command for her to be silent, which she obeyed without any clear ideas as to what feelings might be going on beneath his impassive exterior. He went to his room and wrote a note to Rosamond, and a long and more than usually affectionate letter to Frank: then, desiring nothing so much as to be outside the house and free from observation, he walked to the post-office and mailed them himself, returning to his brother's place by another road. He entered a gate at the foot of the grounds, and at once strode toward a thicket of willows, where, among the cool shadows, he flung himself with violence on the grass and repeatedly pressed his forehead to the damp earth.

Plenty of intoxications assail a man in a wide career. Maurice had kept his head through strong temptations, yet something in his aunt's words this morning seemed quite to have turned his brain. "She loves you" sounded in his ears in endless iteration. No words to which he had listened in all his life had ever been so sweet, but then, too, no words had ever been so maddening, dangerous. Besides this present enlightenment, the past all at once came back to his mind, freshly renewing itself with clear interpretation. From the moment he had first seen Felise stand with her hand—oh, that delicious hand!—caressing her uncle's cheek he had loved her. There was no doubt now about the feeling she inspired in him. Time and time again through these pleasant summer days she had put a subtle fever in his blood. Yet against all her winsome-

ness he had worn armor. He loved his brother, and rejoiced that he should be the husband of the fairest woman he had ever seen: he himself had decided to seek in marriage other elements of happiness than love, but Frank's life must be different. It must be blessed with such tenderness as Felise, and Felise alone, could give. But these had been his thoughts yesterday. To-day, against this new conviction that she loved himself, Maurice could school his heart by no philosophy. Not once before since his boyhood had any such fever absorbed him to the exclusion of the main objects of his existence. When, finally, his senses returned to him, he was still lying under the willows. He looked at his watch: it was half-past four. He sprang up. "I suppose," he said to himself audibly, "that most men are fools sooner or later. But perhaps no man was ever before such a fool as I have been for the last four hours. Not content with being a fool, I must needs play the villain too."

He loathed himself. He took pleasure in calling himself names, and in trampling on his hitherto assured belief in his powers of self-command. In fact, nothing could have been more high-minded than his soliloquies, and, put in words and declaimed in a touching voice with eloquent delivery and appropriate gesticulation, they would have had a powerful effect upon any audience, and have thoroughly convinced his listeners of his earnestness. Yet perhaps while even Hamlet and Cato were uttering their impassioned monologues, some few lesser thoughts revealed themselves to their inward consciousness which they did not cry aloud for fear of dwarfing the grandeur of their speeches. Certain it is, at least, that for ordinary mortals it is very hard to be absolutely in earnest. What our mind wills is not always obeyed by our actions; and in any crisis of our lives we find ourselves, after scrupulously weighing alternations and deciding on the most immaculately high-toned conduct, still favoring other pleas than those urged by sternness and painful duty. It is not so easy to banish claims of heart

and sense when they solicit us so powerfully, whisper so beseechingly. When they can promise all that makes life dear to us, and when their fatally sweet voice is heard nearer and closer than others, we are indeed strong if we can silence it as a delirious fever-fantasy.

Maurice had no wish to come under the scrutiny of eyes enlightened by long experience of his accustomed moods, and rejoiced that he had accepted an invitation to a public banquet in the neighboring city in honor of some celebrated stranger. Any one who knew him well to-night would have observed a positive change in his complexion, and the intense brilliance of his eyes declared that some effective magic had been at work and lent to his face all the glow and fire of youth. He spoke after supper, and genuine inspiration was in his words: he always possessed in the highest degree the gift that is called eloquence; yet it was natural for him to repress it, as he desired above all reputations to gain that of a practical man, and dreaded the dangers of an ornate or rhetorical style; but to-night high thoughts and enchanting images were aglow before his mind, and his language rose to poetry. It was not enough for him, as usual, to sketch his subject in large, bold outlines, and define his views with exactness and accuracy, but he must invest it with a powerful magic that kindled and stirred his hearers into enthusiasm.

He drove back to Saintford at eleven o'clock. The moon was up, but a great dusty cloud like a gigantic winged bird hung poised below it, so that the silver light did but little to illumine the night. Strong gusts of wind occasionally swayed the sombre masses of trees on either hand, and at times low thunder muttered from the west, and occasional lightnings played as the storm rose and lulled over the distant hills. Maurice was at fever-heat still, but it was rather the elation of sudden freedom from the shackles of habit and routine than from hope or expectation. No one can thoroughly estimate the forces within him until he is thrilled by the deepest and best love of which his nature is capable; and this new

emotion which moved Maurice awoke with an electric touch the long-slumbering enthusiasm of his nature, which was the fresher, perhaps, that it had slept beneath frost and shadows so many years. On reaching Frank's cottage he learned that his aunt and cousin had not returned from a party at Mrs. Dury's, and he at once directed his steps thither.

Supper was just over when he reached the pretty parlors of the charming widow, and she at once informed him that the cotillon was forming, and that she hoped he would find a partner for it. Maurice was inspired by her words with a sudden wish to dance. He carefully drew on fresh gloves, and after speaking to Mrs. Meredith and Violet, who were apparently in no need of his attentions, he went through the rooms looking for Miss Clairmont. He had not seen her for ten days, and it was but natural that he should wish to shake hands with her. He had wondered at intervals all day what he should say to her when he met her face to face. Now, at any rate, he would have small chance of saying anything more than one usually says to one's next neighbor in a crowded room. He found her presently, still standing in an alcove of the dining-room, and his first question was whether he should give her some peaches. She declined fruit, however, and still stood tranquilly listening to the chatter of three or four boys who were crowding around her. She was dressed in white and wore strings of pearls about her neck, and their mystical purity and the colorless dress may have rendered her more pale than usual. Maurice chose to see something strange yet indefinably lovely in the expression of her face: her lips only had a trace of color, and they were red as a scarlet flower, while her eyes were more intense than usual in their expression, although after one glance at him their lids swooped down and hid them, so that he could only study their curled black lashes. But she was not a woman to look at and say tamely, "She loves me!" and Maurice shivered as from a magnetic shock, and even his finger-tips tingled, as finally she looked up at him a second time.

"I am glad you have come back," she said simply. "I hope you had a pleasant time at Saratoga."

"But I did not go for pleasure."

"I hope, then, you have returned to Saintford for pleasure."

"Ah!" he murmured with an insatiable glance, "that I do not know as yet. Will you dance the German with me?"

The color came to her face, and her lips took the curves that a grieved child's face shows. "Oh, I am so sorry!" she exclaimed with outspoken regret, "but I have been engaged for this cotillon for five days. I am so disappointed!" she went on, stinging him with her words, and smiling too in the most provokingly heart-whole manner, "for I should have been so vain at having such a partner, and—"

Just here she was interrupted by an enchanting little salaam from a long-legged, moustached youth, who offered his arm in an assured way, blandly ignoring the claims of anything so dull and elderly as Senator Layton. Felise threw him a little glance and smile as she walked toward the parlors, while he stood rooted to the spot.

"Can you not find a partner, Mr. Layton?" asked Mrs. Dury, approaching him.

He smiled, or at least those facial muscles which usually manage a smile moved. "Since you do not dance, Mrs. Dury," he returned with an air of high ceremony, "will you not allow me to talk to you?"

The fair widow replied coquettishly, although she on her part was suffering disappointment, for Morton had gone behind the curtains of a bay-window with Miss Meredith and settled himself for a long tête-à-tête. Maurice brought an easy-chair, put his hostess into it, then leaned over it for three mortal hours until the German was finished. He did not once look at the dancers: the sight of Felise waltzing would have been abhorrent to him.

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#### CHAPTER XV.

MORTON had no sooner betrayed his indiscretion of offering himself to Miss

Clairmont in the hearing of Miss Meredith than he regretted it, for Violet's manner at once assured him that he had lost ground with her, and that what he had lost was more than he had ever gained. She gave him one glance, then turned and left him, and in her look he saw a great deal—a thousand beautiful memories of their youth, together with its sweet and vivid hopes; her years of restless disappointment, in which, as she had repeatedly told him, she had cared for nothing, settled to nothing; his fidelity to her, from which she had argued the higher worth of his devotion than any love, no matter how ardent, of to-day. He experienced in one moment, while her scornful but tremulous glance fell upon him, the possibilities of happiness that his wavering fancies had imperiled: one flash of self-consciousness showed him how unworthy he had been compared with his lofty ideal of a lover, and he sprang after her and begged her for a moment to listen to him, but she neither looked at him nor spoke, and the hours that followed seemed his first experience of irremediably dreary days.

Violet meanwhile bore with meagre indications of pain what was in truth a bitter mortification and disappointment to her. But she was a woman of the world, and expected less of men and women than an enthusiast. She had seen little of heroism, yet she had believed for a time in Morton, and yielded faith to his professions that he had loved her all these years for love's sake—that with scant hope of recompense he had accepted his hopeless passion for its value to himself and its power to give shape and meaning to his life, apart from any circumstances which could make its consequences a source of real happiness to him. But now she felt that to retain any semblance of belief in him after such a deception she must be insensible to reason and doomed to illusion. Above all, she hated to feel that she was a dupe: that she had once credited his professions made her despise herself.

Felise came in to pass the morning with her, and she found her friend in a peculiar mood: she was full of levity, of

frolicsome mirth, but her elation resembled that of a cat who plays with her mouse before she tears it to pieces. Felise listened to her gravely, puzzled and ill at ease, for beneath all these outbursts of wit she discovered some strong motive of sadness, and in the little delicate shafts of satire aimed at herself she felt a sting at her own heart. She expostulated finally with Violet, who kissed her. "I kiss the beautiful lips," said she, "for which so many are starving. I know a long list of your lovers, Felise, quite by heart. So it appears you have another?"

Felise flushed, and tears of vexation stood in her eyes. "Oh," she cried, "is it that which makes you so cruel to-day, Violet? Who told you?"

"Who but himself?" returned Violet laughing. "He implored our compassion. I forget his words, but he told us something like this—that he was the most miserable of men." She flung herself on the floor beside the young girl and looked up into her face. "Why did you not take him, Felise?" she asked lightly. "To be sure, I want you to marry Frank, but Mr. Morton is an old friend of mine, and I grudge him no happiness. He is a man worthy of a woman's interest—clever, sensitive, manly—pre-eminently masculine, indeed, for he is so fickle."

"He is not so fickle as he may seem," returned Felise with a little nod. "Besides, Violet," she went on, "aren't you a little apt not to reward fidelity? You talk of constancy, yet you are the first to despise a man for being constant. Since you know so much, I will tell you more about Mr. Morton. His profession of admiration for me was not inspired by anything that gave it an appearance of a real wish that I should take him at his word. Were I vain enough to make a list of my lovers, I should never put him among them. I understand his motive in speaking to me. He knows that you are engaged—that it is not—not precisely honorable for him to confess himself in love with you; and so, suddenly, abruptly, he resolved to do something which should carry him off his present footing of uncertainty, and he—" She grew

scarlet at the end of her speech, and stopped short.

"So he asked you to marry him?" said Violet dryly. "Say that he was in a quicksand which threatened to swallow him up, where did his abrupt leap take him to? Apparently, if he counted on hard ground at your feet, your answer made even that foothold crumble beneath him."

"I always fail in metaphor," Felise rejoined laughing. "But between us we have made out his present position to be precarious. I hope you intend to do something for him."

"What could I do for him?"

"You can, it seems to me, do something for yourself," returned Felise, caressing the beautiful head which lay across her lap. "Everybody sees that both he and Mr. Wilmot love you dearly. You cannot marry them both, Violet."

Violet seemed irrepressibly amused. "My dear little girl," said she, starting up and regaining her equanimity, "you are so deliciously unconscious of your own position. You don't find it necessary to marry all the men in love with you. You are the poorest preacher in the world. Except that I have an intense curiosity to see what you are finally going to do with yourself, I would preach a sermon to you."

Felise looked at her with wide wondering eyes, then colored and looked very haughty. "I do not understand you," she said. "Mr. Morton was nothing to me—nothing."

"Oh, I was not alluding to him, child. Let him rest. What is he to me? I am engaged to marry Leslie Wilmot—poor, stupid, foolish Leslie! Who knows but that he is offering himself to some girl at Newport at this moment? I was born unlucky: I can keep nothing. The fashion of this world soon changes with me."

Luigi brought in tea, and Violet sipped hers with the utmost composure of soul: it was not very strong, but she decided that henceforth she would have no emotions stronger in effect than the weakest tea. Morton dropped in with an apologetic air to bring a message from

Mrs. Dury, and little Bel Dury was clinging to his hand. Men are subject at times to crueler mortifications than women can ever experience, and his feelings on encountering the glances of Miss Meredith and Felise, and reading in each an accusation, were as worthy of a veil as those of Agamemnon.

"Mrs. Dury begged me to come and ask you not to forget her invitation sent here in your absence," he said, looking at Miss Meredith.

"How good of Mrs. Dury and of you!" answered Violet. "We found the note, and I think we shall have the pleasure of attending Mrs. Dury's little party. Sit down, Mr. Morton, and have some tea.—Felise, did you give Mr. Morton tea at all hours of the day, as we do here?"

"No," replied Felise: "we do not drink tea so often. I dare say Mr. Morton missed it."

"Oh no," said Violet. "Men do not care for tea: it is only we women who require something to stimulate, divert and amuse us. Men have a wider ocean of excitement to drown their cares in than our little teapots afford.—You have so many resources, Mr. Morton! You have little Bel, too.—Bel, do you like this gentleman?"

"Yes," replied Bel: "I love him very much."

"She has not yet grown up," remarked Morton with a smile: "by and by she will be too wise either to have the sentiment or to avow it."

He had made an effort to rise to the requirements of his position, and now sat tranquilly with the child on his lap, feeding her with lumps of sugar from the dish among the tea-service beside him on the table.

"I had never thought," observed Violet, "how adaptable you are, Mr. Morton—so well calculated for peaceful domestic life by the fireside between a wife and child.—Is Mr. Morton good to you, little Bel?"

"Pretty good," returned Bel. "Sometimes when I want to have him come in he goes up the hill to see that lady;" and she pointed at Felise, whose eyes met Morton's with frank amusement. "But

he came this morning," the child continued, "and he helped mamma pick flowers for the party."

"Mr. Morton is very good," said Violet gravely. "He believes in complete impartiality. I dare say, hereafter, little Bel, you will see him a great deal."

"He is coming to our party to-night," cried Bel. "And I am to sit up until supper-time. Mr. Morton says he will dance with me. I have got a white dress and blue ribbons, and Jane is going to curl my hair with a stick, and I shall look very nice.—You will dance with me, won't you, Mr. Morton?"

Mr. Morton made his promise, and took his leave with the child still holding his hand. He was silent and grave, and something in his stern face awed the little girl. When he was about to leave her in her mother's garden she clung to him tenderly, and as he stooped put up her little rosebud mouth and kissed him. He had had few caresses in his life, and those he had won stirred too strange meanings at his heart to give him peace. He had a shyness in these matters, like other childless men, and had never kissed little Bel before. Something in her artless fondness touched him deeply.

"Why do you cry?" she asked him, staring at his eyes.

"Do I cry?" he exclaimed. "It is because you are very good to me, my little one."

Morton had been deeply anxious to know if Violet were going to this party, and for that reason had willingly undertaken to be Mrs. Dury's messenger; for, unless he could meet her there, he had determined that he must make some other opportunity of speaking with her. He watched for her to enter the house that evening, and at once followed, and, after speaking to his hostess, passed on to Miss Meredith, who was arrayed to-night not only in rare beauty, but in a manner of intolerable pride and indifference. Her dark eyes sought his composedly, and she listened to him with languor; but he was not to be repulsed, and would not be shaken off. Violet had gained for herself plenty of general admirers among Mrs. Dury's coterie, but

to-night not one of them could win her attention. She declined dancing, and sat in an easy-chair looking mostly into her bouquet, and when any one except Morton addressed her upon any subject which promised to need many words, she yawned a most delicious yawn shaded by her bouquet or the feathers of her fan, but still too unmistakably a yawn for any one to see it twice and linger too near her.

"I think," she remarked quietly to Morton as the evening advanced, "that as soon as supper is over I shall go home."

"Suppose," said he, meeting her eyes, "you have a little talk with me instead?"

She looked at him, scarcely seeming to see him: her eyes said nothing, but something in her whole pose of head and shoulders seemed to express scorn. "What do you wish to say to me?" she asked.

"All that you will let me say," he retorted with a bow. "It seems you do not yet understand me."

"Very well," she said, her eyebrows knitting slightly and her nostrils dilating. "It is a misfortune to be *un homme incompris*."

When Morton came out of the bay-window that evening after his long talk with Violet he seemed wrought up to an extraordinary pitch of nervous excitement. His face was unusually pale and his eyes burned like coals. Violet, on the contrary, was more sleepy and tranquil than ever.

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#### CHAPTER XVI.

MAURICE had told himself repeatedly yesterday that of all calamities which could have happened to him none would be greater than that he should have gained the love of a young girl like Felise, since love was a passion apart from his life. But this morning, the day after the party at Mrs. Dury's, he was in a less settled frame of mind. In fact, Miss Clairmont's manner to him the night before had been so far from inducing any belief in his mind that he was more to

her than another, that he experienced a sort of bitterness like that of defeat after exalted hope. Did she care for him or not? He could fix his attention upon nothing which did not tend toward the solution of this problem. Let the answer turn which way it might, it was a most unnecessary piece of knowledge for Miss Clifford's future husband, yet he wrestled with the enigma as if he held some vital interest in its elucidation. Since in any case he must renounce all thought of Felise, as they could not marry without ruining others' hopes and others' lives, it would sweeten and ennoble renunciation to know that she had once loved him. Sad enough would be the fate of the man who was obliged to sacrifice the priceless treasure of such tenderness, and to take up with inferior joys and a monotonous existence void of personal happiness; but the certainty that he had once been loved, even let the love be unconfessed in words, might after a time become a consolation, even as the remembered caresses of our beloved dead are the consolation of our meagre after-lives.

Thus dwelling on the subject, he felt his whole nature imperiously demand that he should search and know if Felise cared for him. His quick temperament and absolute decision of mind had always mastered his perplexities before, and he rebelled impatiently against the oppressive circumstances and irksome conventionalities which seemed now to deny him the exercise of his usual powers. By eleven o'clock in the morning he had decided that bare justice to himself required that he should settle the question. Surely, a man not only possessed of considerable social experience, but a clever lawyer besides, would encounter small difficulty in making the discovery whether or no a young girl whose emotions were always written on her face loved him. Afterward? Bah! Questions settle themselves, and no one can predict results before he has convinced himself about causes. He must set out at once to call upon Felise, for Frank and Leslie Wilmot were on their way to Saintford, with Miss Clifford and her

aunt and cousin on board the yacht: they might arrive at any hour past noon, and this was positively his last chance of seeing Miss Clairmont alone. Acting is so much easier than thinking when important interests are at stake that most of the sorry dramas of our lives come from our pride in making an heroic decision to do something at once.

On entering Mrs. Knight's morning-room Maurice found Felise coiled up in a huge arm-chair drawn up before an open window, reading a novel.

"Don't move," said he before she had time even to speak. "You danced too much last night: you are worn-out to-day, and too languid to stir. What are you reading?" He drew a chair close beside her and stretched out his hand for her book: "Oh, a love-story?"

"Of course it is a love-story," returned Felise, "and you cannot think how interesting it is. I am quite consumed with longing to know if somebody is in love with the heroine."

"But you cannot find out for an hour or two yet. Of course he is in love with her, or the novel would never have been written. You may usually make up your mind that written romances turn out as you wish to have them."

"Since you have a theory about them, you must have read a great many novels," said Felise.

"Oh yes. Sometimes, when I am quite faint and wrought up with overwork, I take a week to rest, and read nothing else. You should see Mr. Clifford, Judge Herbert and myself at Oaklands now and then: we all lie on sofas in the study and devour sentimental trash. Herbert has a fashion of howling when he comes to a catastrophe, and Clifford cries over love-passages and reads them aloud in a quavering voice. When the judge gets really excited, he kicks and throws his long legs into the air."

"And when you are deeply moved—?"

"I? Oh, I weep unrestrainedly, you know. Last May I was at Oaklands a week with the two men. Rosamond and Mrs. Herbert had gone to New York on a shopping-excursion, and taken poor Bert with them. A rain-storm set in,

and we rummaged out piles of paper-covered novels from the library closets, and set to work amusing ourselves. What days those were! A prolonged howl sounded from Judge Herbert, and his legs were so high in air that I predicted an apoplectic attack. He was reading *Jane Eyre*. Clifford had got hold of *David Copperfield*, and screamed with laughter and wept by turns. One evening we went out to dinner, and when soup was taken away and the fish came on, the judge produced his novel from his pocket. 'I never eat fish,' said he, 'and you won't mind if I save time by getting on with my book a little?' Clifford shrieked with laughter. 'I say ditto to Mr. Burke,' he cried as soon as he could speak: 'I wanted to read about Dora, poor little Dora;' and he produced his book. And those two old boys read their books through the entire meal, while I in my blasé middle age ate my dinner sensibly."

He went on for a time, giving anecdotes of his two old friends and brother-statesmen, and Felise listened with the rapt attention of a happy child.

"You make me garrulous," he exclaimed finally. "When I am with you I want to talk for ever."

"Nothing would please me so much as listening to you for ever," rejoined Felise. She met his eyes, and grew scarlet. "I am all alone to-day," she went on, wondering at her sudden and overwhelming embarrassment beneath his glance. "Aunt and uncle went to town, and will not be at home until evening. I invited Violet to come up and lunch with me, but she sent back word that she was engaged for the entire morning."

"Invite me in her stead," suggested Maurice.

"Will you lunch with me, Mr. Layton?"

"I rarely eat lunch, for I am a man tremendously fond of his dinner. But what have you to offer me?"

"Let me consider. There are two peaches apiece for us, and I will give you some Sauterne that my uncle likes. Then you shall have some wafer biscuits and some almond macaroons which I made myself."

"Great Heavens! You make almond macaroons and wafer biscuits! I shall certainly seize such an opportunity to test your powers of cooking. I will stay willingly, for no such repast as you describe will have any effect upon my appetite for dinner."

"Oh, there will be something substantial. You shall have a bird for the *pièce de résistance*."

"At what hour do you lunch?"

"Not until one o'clock: restrain your impatience."

"It will seem like two children playing at keeping house: a most charming arrangement."

"Rachel must wait on the table," observed Felise saucily, "or my aunt would scold me when she returns."

Felise had never appeared to Maurice so completely bewitching, at the same time that he had never seen her so calm and indifferent.

"Come!" said he to himself, "I am not getting on. I will master all indiscretion. I will not, I dare not, think of loving her, but I must know if her heart is absolutely calm where I am concerned."

Somehow, a little silence had crept over them since last their eyes had met, then been suddenly averted. It was a pleasant silence, for they could hear the murmur of the summer wind in the trees (the same wind which was wafting Frank Chester and Miss Clifford toward Saintford), and even the buzzing of the bees in the beds of lilies outside.

"When I am really married, settled and at housekeeping," observed Maurice, leaning nearer to Felise and speaking in a peculiarly soft voice, "I fear there will be little or nothing of play about it, for having a house in Washington brings heavy responsibilities in its train. So let me forget that a moment. You know you told me I might talk on for ever; so, for talk's sake, imagine that I am married to a different sort of woman from Rosamond—that instead of living for the world, my wife—my young and beautiful wife—and I live only for one another."

Felise's eyes had fallen at first beneath

his glance, which was at once commanding and caressing, but she rallied and raised them again resolutely, and now was looking at him, but with sober lines about her mouth and gradually-receding color.

"This young, beautiful wife should be a woman much like—well, say much like you, child," pursued Maurice, flushing deeply, but his look never swerving from the exquisite face full before him and at his mercy: "she should not only look like you, but possess your varied clevernesses. She should make for me almond macaroons: in fact, I should be willing to dine on such unsubstantial food in that château d'Espagne where we would live. I am the most active and energetic of men, but, Miss Clairmont, I swear to you that under those conditions—a face so fair to look into, hands so soft and white to clasp—I swear to you I could live on little besides love, and let the world go by."

His eyes gleamed, and his voice, though sunk to a whisper, was eloquent with vehement feeling. She had continued to meet his look as long as she could, but at last her eyelids drooped and her lips grew tremulous.

"But such a château d'Espagne is for a younger fellow than I," he pursued relentlessly. "So young, so lovely a creature, could never care for the middle-aged man that I have grown to be. Could she, Miss Clairmont?"

He paused for an answer, and when none came he repeated his question. Her lips opened once as if she would speak: she looked up, then turned abruptly away, and was perfectly mute. Maurice had met her eyes, and felt an intoxication more delicious than the madness roused by wine. A great surge of tenderness stirred him from head to foot, and it needed all his self-command for him to restrain himself from clasping her in his arms. He rose, absolutely giddy, and walked to the window, and just for the sake of breaking the appalling stillness, which was so full of temptation, he went on, speaking mechanically, as if trying to convince them both that their momentary revelation through that mutual

despairing gaze did not mark an epoch in the life of each: "Did I tell you, Miss Clairmont, that my brother comes to-day? I had a letter this morning, posted at Stonington, and they will reach here by five o'clock at latest. Frank and Wilmot have quite a party on board the Pansy. Miss Clifford is returning with them to make a week's visit at the cottage, and her aunt is with her, and her cousin, an agreeable fellow whom you will be sure to like."

There was no response to this announcement, and Maurice turned sharply around. Felise had risen with the design of escaping from the room, but something so blinded her that she caught her dress in her chair, and the muslin, although it tore, still would not rend wide enough to leave her free. Maurice, coming back to her, saw that tears were running down her face. She knew that he discovered her utter humiliation, and trembled violently while she crimsoned with shame. He murmured some incoherent words, and tried to take her hand, but she repulsed him, and at last, quite worn out with her struggle, gave way utterly, and sinking to the floor buried her face in the cushions of her seat. His thoughts were not enviable, and he bent over her with a perfect passion of remorse.

"Look up for one moment," he whispered. "Child, child! you are breaking my heart!"

"Please to go away," she answered without stirring. "I am so—so tired to-day. Please to go away."

"Dear child, how can I? I am too concerned for you. Until I know that you forgive me, I cannot go away without feeling that I must go and destroy myself."

She shivered from head to foot, but made a resolute effort and raised her head, and with admirable self-command

said simply and with decision, "I have nothing to forgive—nothing. It is you who must pardon my folly. I am sure you will be good, and will remember that I am quite young, and, compared with a great man like you, an absurd child."

She rose to her feet, and their looks met: a sob burst from her, and she broke away from his glance hurriedly.

"Now, good-bye," she said: "surely, you will go away and not refuse my request?"

"I will do anything you tell me to do, Felise," he cried in a tone of despair. He turned to take his hat, when the bell rang and a servant passed along the hall to attend the door. His instinct was to screen her from observation, and he instantly closed the shutters, that the darkness might cover her tears. A note was brought in, and he advanced and received it, himself handing it to Felise.

"It is from Mrs. Meredith," she said: then opening and glancing at it added, "She invites me to dine with you all at the cottage to meet—"

Maurice's eyes smarted as she broke down again. He pitied himself intensely, but more deeply still he pitied her. She seemed to him weak and forsaken unless he might take her in his arms and comfort her.

"—To meet Miss Clifford," Felise went on after a miserable pause. "Will you tell Mrs. Meredith that I will accept her invitation?" Then, after another great effort, she added, "It will be a great privilege for me, Mr. Layton, to meet Miss Clifford, of whom I have heard so much—your future wife."

He looked at her a moment more, then wrenched himself away from the fascination which bound his glance to her face, bowed, and was gone.



## PART V.

### CHAPTER XVII.

THE Pansy made port by half-past four that afternoon, and twenty minutes later the party were all at the cottage. Mrs. Meredith was the only one to receive them, but when Luigi was showing Miss Clifford to her room Maurice issued from the study and met her in the corridor.

"I took you by surprise, Maurice?" said she, looking in his face as he shook hands with her.

"No, I wrote you yesterday that I fully hoped you would accept Frank's invitation. You could not have done better than to come. Did you have a good passage? Was the Sound smooth?"

"Like glass. I hope I am not sunburned. I wore six thicknesses of barège over my face, in order not to greet you with a red nose. Maurice, here is Aunt Sarah."

"Such a ridiculous way of getting to a place!" remarked Mrs. Anderson, who had apparently lent all her veils to her niece, as her own face was scarlet. "I am seasick and sunburned, and tired to death. Don't look at me, Mr. Layton, until I am dressed, and don't detain me, for I want to lie down for half an hour before dinner;" and she gained the seclusion of her own allotted apartment and closed the door, leaving Maurice and Rosamond quite alone in the hall. She moved toward him and kissed him calmly.

"You are not well, Maurice?" she said: "what ails you?"

"Nonsense, Rosamond! I am perfectly well," he rejoined with an air of annoyance.

"Are you really glad to see me?" she asked. "You look quite unlike yourself."

He put his arm about her and embraced her almost passionately. "I ought to be glad to see you," he exclaimed with vehemence. "Rosamond, why are you not my wife? I wish to God we had been married in June."

She laughed slightly, but stared at him, and thought in her heart he had never seemed so much in love. "Oh, we settled that subject," she replied carelessly. "Is this my room? How pretty it is! and Frank knew my caprice for blue. Now, Maurice, I shall shut the door on you;" which she did accordingly, and when she was in her chamber said to herself repeatedly that she had never seen him behave so queerly.

Violet was so obliging as to come down twenty minutes before dinner-time in response to the messages Leslie Wilmot sent up from the library, which he traversed while he waited some hundreds of times, trembling and flushing at every sound. When she finally appeared, she greeted him very kindly, but bade him beware of over-affectionate demonstrations, as she was *en grande mise* to meet the sublime Miss Clifford. Leslie was enraptured with his fiancée's beauty, her toilette, and, above all, her easy good-nature. But she laughed at his ugliness, which was very pronounced, indeed, from the effects of his cruise, and he ran to a mirror and regarded his crimson and bistre face, well freckled besides, with a rueful glance.

"But, after all," he exclaimed, "I'm never good-looking. You like me all the same, don't you, Pansy?"

"Indeed I do. You're not handsome or clever, Leslie, but, I give you my word, I like you extremely."

"And you love me a little too, darling?"

"Oh, love! I know nothing about love. Do you know what it means, this *love* people talk about?"

"I know—I know," cried Wilmot, and buried his face in her dress. She lifted his head and kissed him with the first real impulse of tenderness she had ever felt for him. He fell on his knees. "Violet," he said, "I want you to promise something."

"I will promise anything."

"To marry me in October."

"If you are so good as to wish it. No, no, I cannot have this crêpe crushed. But let me tell you something, Leslie. In the past you may have doubted me sometimes: you may have said, 'After all, the girl who has promised to be my wife is possessed of beauty perhaps, but has neither tenderness, nor sweetness, nor charm;' but hereafter you can say, 'Whatever faults she has—and they are a thousand—she really cares for me, and is going to make me a good wife.' No, no, Leslie!" and she held up a warning finger as he showed signs of impetuosity again. "I dare say," she went on, "that I may give you a great deal of trouble—there are times when I shall hate my servitude, and perhaps cry out against my life, for I have an unbearable temper and pride, Leslie—but don't despair of me. And if anybody says that I am going to marry you because you are rich—that I value the splendid home you can give me, and the jewels and the gay easy life—never believe it for a moment. It is not for your wealth I take you, Leslie, but because you seem to me so much more true and honest than other men. If I really loved anybody, I should be glad to marry him and live with him in a hut. I know the world, and am sick and weary of it all. I care little for its prizes—I am indifferent to its praise. I am going to marry you because you love me and believe in me. And as soon as I am at home again you shall choose your own time to take me. Now, Leslie, those laces!"

"D—the laces!" said Leslie; and he had his own way after all, but smoothed out flounces and ruffles afterward with an apologetic air.

Frank Layton was unaffectedly glad to be at home again, and had run over his house and grounds with the glee of a boy, Luigi at his heels uttering the most gracious Italian compliments: "The flowers have not bloomed since the absence of the padrone, nor has the sun shone. The heavenly-faced signorina has looked pale and sad when she has asked the unhappy Luigi, 'And when, Luigi, is the padrone coming back?'"

Frank did not for a moment believe what his brown-skinned Neapolitan was saying, yet nevertheless it was all very pleasant.

"The most beautiful signorina is coming to dinner, and I have put her cover at your left hand, padrone, with the loveliest flowers about it."

"Coming to dinner?" shouted Frank—"Miss Clairmont coming to dinner? And it is already six o'clock, and I have not dressed!"

He wasted no more time out of doors looking at his flowers, but went to his room at once. He discovered that a box of his best cigars, left by accident behind him on his table, was gone, and he instantly divined that Luigi had needed their strength and fragrance to support him under his loneliness; but he only laughed. So the absurd fellow had wreathed Miss Clairmont's place with flowers! Live Luigi! He might have a fresh box of Havanas.

Frank dressed rapidly, and was only a moment later than Miss Clairmont, and in fact they all had a half hour to wait before Miss Clifford descended from her room. Felise met him with angel sweetness: never had she seemed to him so beautiful and winning. There shone a deeper light than usual in her eyes, and a sort of tenderness brooded over her face. She usually dressed with girlish simplicity, but to-night, as if in some way she wished to assure the world that she was not the child she sometimes seemed, she had assumed the dress of a stately woman. She wore blue, and over her shoulders showed the rare texture of priceless lace, which was folded about her in some quaint and beautiful fashion and made a ruff about her throat. She looked years older than she had in the morning in a blue-spotted white frock, with her hair on her shoulders. Frank decided at first that a certain indefinable change he remarked in her was due to her unusually rich attire, but presently it was revealed to him that she had the touching aspect to-night of Beatrice Cenci as Guido painted her. He suddenly stopped speaking, and bent a deep, attentive, longing look upon her. Why did

she carry such languor in her eyes, the languor of the mood that follows tears? She was glad enough to turn away from his over-wise glances, for she was quite conscious of being unlike herself, and, but for the dread of remaining at home to go over her weary thoughts, could not have forced herself to dress and go out into the world.

Maurice understood her very well, even to the instinct which had led her to deck herself so bravely in her jewels and lace. He had decided that she must have no terror at meeting him, and accordingly he had watched for the carriage, and himself assisted her to alight and brought her in. He possessed consummate tact when he chose to exercise it, and his easy yet ceremonious manner had tranquilized her at once. He had continued to stand near her while Frank told her of his pleasure in coming home again, and the moment he perceived that his brother's attention was caught by the over-lustre of the eyes and the tense curves of her lips, he came up and introduced Jack Clifford and bespoke her good graces for him.

Jack was Rosamond's cousin, and nephew to Secretary Clifford, and his family explained the basis of his pursuits by always saying, "Poor Jack! he has his own fortune to make: he is studying law in Washington." He was, in fact, at the office of his senior in Washington about three months in the year, but during that period the excessive demands of society upon his time and attention precluded the possibility of his wasting much of his valuable energy upon his law-books. He was the best of fellows, handsome and well dressed as an Englishman, yet possessing the vivacity and grace of a Frenchman, with a delightful way of making trifles diverting, while more serious matters were encountered by him in a spirit which induced one to believe he could do anything if he would. He was a perfect dancer, sang pleasantly, could draw caricatures capitally, and act better than the most finished society-actor on the stage. Most men liked him, although they condemned his easy-going ways

of achieving his purposes as d——d impertinence, and pretended to laugh at his belief in himself, and to despise his accomplishments. As for women, he was no stranger in any civilized city on the face of the earth, and was in the habit of saying there were few pretty women in the world whom he had not at least danced with. The moment that he had cast his eyes on Miss Clairmont he stared into Maurice's face.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed under his breath, "who is she?"

Maurice explained rather shortly.

"Is she engaged to anybody?"

"No."

"Anybody devoted to her?"

"Just watch and see."

"I thought she might be the object of your brother's admiration: if not, he makes a great mistake, for she is simply irresistible. I think it highly probable she may care for him, too, for, on my life, he is the best fellow I know."

Maurice shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm free to go in, then, am I?" pursued Jack.

"You don't expect me to tell you. You're always in such confounded spirits over your good luck, I don't in the least mind seeing you reduced to despair."

"You evidently think I shall be badly singed. But, now, why should she not fancy me?"

"Just so—why should she not? 'The knave is handsome, young, and hath all those elements in him that folly and green minds look for.'"

"Come on, then. Introduce me, and I'll use my advantages."

But no sooner had Jack made his bow and prepared to utter some clever sparkling little speech than Miss Clifford entered the room with her aunt, and dinner was announced. Felise's eyes at once fastened upon Rosamond, and she had no interest in listening to Jack. Miss Clifford was tall, with a cold, rather austere face, very quiet manners, and, although not possessing any particular grace or perfection of form, was endowed with an air of finished elegance. She could be called neither handsome nor plain, but while she was speaking her

face was pleasing and expressed high earnestness. She was the most colorless of blondes, and her hair was flaxen, but she wore it in an artistic arrangement of braids and curls, and it crowned her small head with an air of distinction. She was as elaborately dressed as mourning would permit, in puffed black tissues and rosettings of ribbons: the corsage, cut square, disclosed a neck and bust of the whiteness of marble, and her sleeves fell back from the thin, pallid arms, which were clasped by innumerable black enamel and pearl bracelets. When she was introduced to Miss Meredith she met her with much cordiality, but her manner toward Miss Clairmont was cold and indifferent in the extreme.

Maurice. Miss Clifford. Morton. Mrs. Anderson.

Mrs. Meredith.

Frank.

Clifford. Miss Meredith. Wilmot. Felise.

If any one takes the trouble to look at the arrangement of the dinner-table, he will at once see that the question of precedence between Miss Clifford and Miss Clairmont had been settled in favor of the latter. Frank was of course obliged to take out Mrs. Anderson, hence Mrs. Meredith had put Felise on the other side, in order to console him for the pangs of a fortnight's absence. Miss Clifford possessed a hundred admirable qualities, but she had one weakness, and that was, that society became insufferable to her unless she took the first place. She had already heard extravagant praise of Felise from Maurice, who, particularly upon his first meeting her, did not spare encomiums; thus, Rosamond was prepared to be critical, and happening to enter the parlor when the young girl was for the moment a centre of attention, and perceiving that she was dressed not only superbly, but with consummate taste, she at once decided that Felise was a flirt; and only this accidental distribution of the dinner-guests was neces-

sary to harden her prepossession against her into an absolute prejudice.

"I hope," said Miss Clairmont to Wilmot as they sat down, "that you enjoyed Newport."

"I had an awfully jolly time," replied Leslie: "I never met such nice people in my life. You can't fancy what favorites we were in society."

"I am glad you were so well treated," said Felise.

Leslie laughed his hearty, boyish laugh. "The fact is," he explained modestly, "we were regularly run after. There were only a dozen fellows there who could be called by any stretch of courtesy marriageable, and hundreds of nice jolly girls. Wasn't it a beastly shame? We were a sort of—what d'ye call it?—gods coming out of a machine in behalf of the pretty creatures, who were tired of fossil beaux and small boys just sprouting moustaches. A rumor got about that one of us was engaged, and I used to say gravely when I was asked that if either of us were engaged, it must be Frank Layton, but that I didn't believe he was. I don't think, though, that the report injured his chances: there were six or eight, at least, with whom he was thick as thieves."

"My dear boy," said Frank, "hold your tongue and don't slander me, or I shall tell Violet about finding you on the 'Forty Steps' at midnight with a pretty ghost all in white with blue ribbons."

"Do!" retorted Leslie with a grimace. "Nothing would suit me better than a little jealousy on her part."

Mrs. Anderson was always in a state of rapture, and was now pouring her admiration of his house into Frank's ears. She complimented him on everything—his furniture, his servants, his china, even his monogram on the silver.

"Such a pleasant dining-room!" she remarked, leaning back between the courses. "But you do not hang your family portraits here."

"No: in fact, I have but two, and they are in my own rooms. Maurice has a few daubs at his house, but I suspect they are in the lumber-room."

"I admire his taste," said Leslie, who

was in excellent spirits. "At home our dining-room is hung about with black canvases which never have daylight enough to discover their true colors, so one can see nothing but a pair of spectral eyes, a white ruff, or a woman's shoulder peering out of the gloom. Our family ain't the handsomest in the world, and it's just as well that the pictures should not be restored. My *pater* sits over his wine, and when he has got pretty deep into his bottle he will say sometimes, 'That's my great-grandfather up there—one of the handsomest men of his day, with Marlborough all through his campaigns, and he killed as many men in duels as in battle. He married three wives, all court beauties and all under eighteen. And now he's dead. And there's my grandfather, who used to hobble about the terrace with a stick and sit in the sunshine on pleasant days: he was fond of me, and used to tip me when I went back to school. And now he's dead. And there's my father, who pestered me with rules and regulations while he was alive, until I felt sometimes that I hated him; but nobody ever loved me half so well; yet now he's dead, and in a little while my portrait will go up there, and I shall be dead.' I'll never have such beastly reminders of our mortality in my dining-room. It's like—What was it they used to have at Egyptian feasts, Pansy?"

"I never had the honor of attending one," returned Violet. "There are no Egyptians in society, that I know."

Mrs. Anderson cast up her eyes and sighed. "'In the midst of life remember death,'" said she.

"Yes," observed Morton, who seemed to be addressed, since Frank was whispering to Felise, "for it is the only real promise of comfort we mortals possess."

"You do not really mean what you say?" cried Mrs. Anderson, who, like other persons that utter pious platitudes, held death in horror and shrank nervously from the conviction that sooner or later handsome dresses and delicate viands and happy laughter would cease at the summons of something black and terrible.

"Why not?" returned Morton; and

he amused himself by epitomizing human careers. "We inherit from our parents weakness, cowardice and love of luxury: wisdom comes to us in the mere experience of living. The age of struggle is over, and we exist in an epoch of consummated work: nothing remains for us but cynical speculation upon what event will next come uppermost. Pleasure does not satisfy us, and compels satiety, yet we shrink from emotion or pain: simple diversions make us smile, for the thought of them induces ennui. Poetry and art move us only to criticism: we grow to loathe books, because we already stagger beneath a weight of ideas and theories which hinder our acceptance of belief in primitive unquestionable facts. We cannot yield ourselves to love even when it conquers us, because we are torn in halves between slow judgment and headlong passion, and halt midway, until we doubt the reality of our intensest feelings. In fact, merely as the result of a high civilization, we are born without hope or faith, like fruit withered in the bud. Why, then, the slaves of such dreary materialism, should we not long for death?"

Mrs. Anderson listened attentively, and spoke highly afterward of Morton's conversational powers. He was in a peculiar state of mind at this time, and alternated between feverish joy in life and intense depression. He had fixed a limit to his uncertainty, and the necessity of such delay until Violet gave him her final answer was his apology for a cowardly dread of disappointment and a disguise for weakness. He had not told himself in so many words that he was at the crisis of his life, and that it would soon be determined whether the rest of his career was to correspond with the successful beginning; but he frequently confessed within his heart that he wanted rest: he had suffered much emotion, and, unless he could be entirely happy, summed up his need in one requirement—tranquillity. For years one impulse had goaded him on, rousing him from ease and sloth with a touch like that of red-hot iron: was he strong enough to endure his restless disappointment to

the end, believing in the worth of one supreme feeling which was to claim no rewards? He watched Violet and Wilmot at dinner, and saw that they had arrived at a mutual understanding, and that Leslie at least felt some pleasurable elation. The thought of Violet's listening first to one and then to another of her suitors made him smile to-night: at other times it filled him with terrible exasperation, and forced a cloud of concentrated rage across his calm vision and assured judgment.

Meanwhile, as dinner progressed, pearls were strewn in vain before Miss Clifford, who chose to be a little out of humor. Maurice combated her whims with some effort at raillery, and when they left the table for the parlors he followed her with assiduous attentions, anxious to avert her mind from the others until she had wreaked upon himself some small feminine spite, which showed itself plainly enough to him both in face and manner.

Felise did not linger in the rooms in Miss Clifford's sight, but went at once to the balcony. They had sat long at dinner, and the rose-flush had gone entirely from the western sky, but the moon shone brilliantly, and only the trees, where they gloomed together in long colonnades, held the shadows of the night. Frank and Clifford followed Felise, arriving at her side simultaneously by different windows, and exchanging a smile of malicious determination not to resign an inch of favorable position for any man alive. Accordingly, Frank seated himself on the railing at her right, and Jack at her left. The latter murmured the pretty speeches he had left unsaid before dinner, while Frank, who was beyond uttering commonplaces to her, gazed at her profile, her charming pose of head above the laces which held her throat and face as the calyx holds the flower, the motions of the little hands, every dimple and vein of which he knew by heart, as she played with the flowers and fan in her lap. What joy to be at last at home again and to find her in his home!

"I hope your idea in coming out here did not spring from any wish for solitude?"

Jack was saying. "Such moonlight would be quite thrown away on one, Miss Clairmont."

"I will save Miss Clairmont from any of the miseries of solitude, Jack," interposed Frank. "Moonlight was not intended for a crowd. You might better go and talk to somebody else: I sha'n't stir until Miss Clairmont goes in."

"But you are host, Frank," retorted Jack, "and really ought not to be too particular. I will divide your duties: go entertain the others, and I will take care of Miss Clairmont."

"I should like," returned Felise in her sweet low voice, "to have both of you entertain me."

"My own fascinations are of the highest order," declared Jack, "but they shine brightest in tête-à-tête."

"I assure you, Miss Clairmont," put in Frank, "Clifford is not so tiresome a fellow as he may seem. If he were not here now, I would give you some pretty little hints about his modest virtues."

All three laughed together, and the light, happy-seeming laughter floated into the parlors.

"So Jack, too, is out there with Miss Clairmont?" remarked Miss Clifford to Maurice, who was sitting beside her on the sofa, trying in vain to make himself comfortable with a blue satin cushion which constantly slipped out of its proper place against his shoulders. "I wish you would go and call him in, Maurice."

"How grateful he would be! Why on earth should I call him in?"

"Because I particularly object to his getting Miss Clairmont in love with him."

Maurice laughed: "Relieve your mind on that score, Rosamond: there's not the smallest danger."

"You men know little of Jack's powers of captivation. When he tries to please every woman falls in love with him."

"Lucky fellow!"

"Is she rich?"

"Who? Miss Clairmont? I have no idea. I suspect the contrary."

"She is very much over-dressed."

"I know no woman in society who always dresses with such absolutely perfect taste."

Rosamond reddened. "She is a young girl—not more than eighteen, is she? Yet she is wearing a small fortune in lace. Positively, I should rarely venture on such extravagance myself, except at a state dinner, and this is not a party at all."

Maurice's heart was so tender over the little girl's assertion of her state and pride in that splendid dress! "Let her wear her pretty lace in peace," said he. "She looks quaint and old-fashioned, like some wonderful painting by an old master."

"Positively, Maurice, you are setting up as the chivalrous defender of that young lady. You usually allow me to express my little opinions in peace." Maurice smiled satirically but said nothing. "I think," pursued Rosamond in a lower voice, "that were I inclined to be jealous, your Quixotic admiration of Miss Clairmont might afford me a pretext. You yourself wrote me that she took you on a long tête-à-tête drive."

Maurice gave a shrug which expressed some fatigue of body or spirit: "There was nothing very particular in that. In fact, I really considered at the time that it was a little heartless in her aunt to remind me of my safe middle age in that way, for Frank, her almost declared lover, has never enjoyed such an honor. We elderly men have our little privileges."

"Elderly men! You shall call yourself nothing of the kind. So Frank really wants to marry her?"

"Yes, and I look upon his success as certain, and wish for nothing so much. Don't allow yourself to be prejudiced against that sweet, lovely girl."

"But, Maurice, my instincts are all against her."

Maurice looked bored, but said to himself that he had never before believed in women's intuitive perceptions.

"On my word!" he said aloud, "I cannot understand why you seem in such an ill-humor. It is a bad habit to cultivate: be gentle and sweet as women should be."

"Oh, those are Miss Clairmont's attributes—gentleness and goodness. Ah, well! I believe I have been cross: forgive me. I promise even to like my future sister-in-law. Only, Maurice, don't

be too loud in your praises of her. I am not used to being governed, and of late you have seemed disposed to try to govern me."

"If I wish you to be gentle and womanly, dear, it is because of my affection for you, not because I wish to govern you. God knows, I have no idea of governing any one: I cannot govern myself. Tell me about the Newport people, Rosamond."

She unloosed an entire budget of gossip, but he did not seem to listen.

"Did you ever reflect," he interrupted presently, "that it was a great pity I gave up my profession?"

"No. Politics must be your profession now."

"Politics cannot fill the entire year. While I was in full practice I had no opportunity for an idle moment: there was always an effort to be made, a result to be accomplished."

"Exactly. And you lived in a whirl of excitement, and had no time for social indulgences. Not a man in office has your social gifts, and it is quite time that you gave up hard work and began to enjoy existence. If —— is elected next year, as we feel certain that he will be, papa and Judge Herbert say that you must have the mission to France or England. That will be delightful for both of us."

"Very delightful," said Maurice, smothering a yawn, "but a very great honor for me, at all events. Such things are called the prizes of life, I suppose. I used to have high dreams of benefiting my fellow-men—of serving my country like a patriot. When I hear of such rewards, I seem to have striven only for personal aggrandizement—good fat offices, honors, titles."

"I had always suspected you of ambition, not humility. Some one must be at the top of the wave, and you always loved success."

"Success? Oh yes. I have no temper to endure anything which is not success. But you want me to go in for social success, and, after all, what is it? To fill up life with petty pleasures, trivial occupations—to have thicker carpets, costlier

pictures and longer dinners than your neighbors. But, after all, it is almost as good as political success. History teaches nothing if it does not teach that no single man has time or chance to achieve a hundredth part of the work he dreamed of; and for one who accomplishes one small result worth having there are hundreds whose entire lives are spent in what proves to be abortive work. Besides, as the world goes now, the real, hearty workers are becoming the tools of men who believe in no reality at all except the rewards of falsehood and fraud, and the visionary who indulges in the hope of a noble government is sickened by the sight of sleek officiality and a world of knaves imploring to be bought and sold."

"Oh, Maurice, what heresies! What would papa say?"

"Your father is one of our last great men: the race is dying out."

"You take a dark view of things. You are not usually a dreamer intolerant of realities and wrapped up in the visions he gazes at from starry heights. What has happened to depress you?"

"Nothing but inaction," returned Maurice with some vehemence and with a gloomy face. "I have had nothing to do this summer—only too much time to think. Give me work, hard, remorseless, grinding work, to do, and I shall finally get to be myself again." He rose as he spoke and stretched his arms in a listless fashion.

"I suppose the truth is," remarked Rosamond, "that you are not well. I saw at once that you looked pale, and your eyes seem sunken. I will give you some belladonna and nux to take before you go up stairs, and I dare say you will look at life more cheerfully to-morrow."

"No, thank you," answered Maurice with a grim smile.—"Here, Aunt Agnes, I will resign Rosamond to you. She is trying to persuade me to try her homœopathic remedies because I am a little out of humor, but I will not allow her to get any such influence over me. I know very well what it is to yield one iota—to swallow everything she offers afterward as we swallow the Thirty-nine Articles:

refusing would be worse than breaking all the commandments at once."

He left Mrs. Meredith with Rosamond, and sauntered through the rooms. The night had grown cold, and Frank had insisted that Miss Clairmont should come in. She stood under the chandelier now, and Jack was urging her to sing. He admitted that he knew all the duets in the world, and an opera-score was produced at once, from which the two sang for an hour. Maurice went out of doors and walked to the extremity of the ground to escape the sound of Felise's voice. As for Frank, he sat down by Mrs. Anderson, and for the first time showed signs of fatigue after his long cruise.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK CLIFFORD pronounced Saintford delightful. "Why," he demanded every morning at breakfast—"why have I never been in Saintford before? *Perdidi diem.*"

But he lost no days now that he had come, and at once became prime mover in all sorts of summer pleasures. The moment he entered Mrs. Knight's parlors he suggested that they were admirably adapted for private theatricals, and as the idea pleased every one, a play was chosen at once and put in course of preparation, Jack of course self-elected manager, costume-designer and scene-painter. He was Figaro-ci, Figaro-là, and Figaro unsatisfied unless he outshone, out-flirted, out-danced every other man. Every morning he painted three hours in Mrs. Knight's back parlor in a costume of black velvet braided with gold, and a cap on his blonde head to match; and a better scene-painter never sketched an outline. At eleven o'clock the party assembled for rehearsal, and although he had good-naturedly given all the best parts to the Laytons and Morton, he created a character for himself in place of the inoffensive personage he had chosen to represent, and forced the others to look to their laurels not to be utterly eclipsed. We need not say that in society no one could approach

him. When talk was in progress, he was always on his native heath, while the ladies were at table he was the most charming fellow, and when he was left alone with his own sex, bursts of laughter followed his stories. Who like him could make the evening a carnival-time of gayety and mirth, yet better still bewitch the ear and bewilder the heart in soft-voiced tête-à-têtes under the white stars? Easy enough it seemed for Jack to invoke

The delight of happy laughter,  
The delight of low replies,

where all women were concerned; and, in short, wherever he stood he was never rayless: other men were sombre beside him.

The very play which he was now superintending passed for his own. Although he disclaimed the authorship, it was considered a justifiable falsehood, like that of the author of *Waverley*. But the truth of the matter was, that Frank Layton had written it years before for an occasion like the present, when no comedietta to be found in print furnished a sufficient number of equally important parts to satisfy six or eight amateurs whose ambition was not to be satisfied by subordinate rôles. When the evening for its production finally came, the play passed off delightfully. The audience were carried, so to say, quite off their feet, and the actors and actresses were sufficiently pleased with themselves to experience high good-humor. They were all titled people, all vicomtes and marquises, and with their splendid Watteau costumes made the stage look like an animated picture from a French fan. Felise had never looked so well, for her toilette was artistically designed by Jack, and carried out her most becoming colors of blue and silver. Maurice was in black velvet and silver, and played a clever, wicked part of equal devotion to three lovely women. Frank was the real lover of Felise, and her husband as well, while Violet was a very magnificent vicomtesse who tried to get everybody's husband and lover away. It was all bright and spirited, as such a play should be, with plenty of repartee and badinage. Felise

sang little songs here and there, and Violet danced a minuet with Maurice. Mrs. Meredith had the only character which carried any deep earnestness, and she put much pathos into her acting, but it was as a whole, light, charming and graceful, as private theatricals should be, and the situations were always relieved of passion or sentimentality by the delicate wit and incessant raillery of three charming women.

Maurice gave his arm to Felise when the last act was over and supper was announced. "Come, marquise," said he: "you and I look remarkably well together. Your azure quite overpowers Frank's purple, but our costumes were designed for harmonious combination. Won't you pay me a compliment? I feel in such good spirits: I never thought myself a quarter so good-looking before."

Felise made him a ravishing little curtsy. "There is no doubt," she returned, laughing, "that you are got up for conquest. Confess that you would like to wear such a splendid dress all the time."

"It would depend somewhat on my occupations. This is an admirable dress for making love in, but I doubt if I could argue a case in court in it. Somebody has said that the real change in the spirit of society came in with the fashion of trousers. I quite believe it: I feel to-night like going in for general fascinating wickedness. For instance, Miss Clairmont, I should like to tell you how thoroughly irresistible you were in the play, and that I never did anything with so much zest as making love to you. Let us go on playing for ever: one may do what one likes in a play."

"Perhaps so," returned Felise, her color overpowering the soupçon of rouge that she wore; "but to play the same thing over and over again might grow tiresome."

"Oh, the play would develop. So far as this has gone, I am quite disgusted with the tame results of all my intense speeches. I am too energetic to be always an unsuccessful lover, as I was to-night: in the sequel I should get my deserts."

They had reached the supper-table, and all the guests crowded about Felise. She was so beautiful to-night that every one was drawn toward her, yet no one could have defined her peculiar charm. Was it her airy dress of silk and gauze, puffed, ribboned and hooped, or her sunny hair piled high on a cushion and adorned with a jeweled aigrette? The women declared her beauty lay in her dress, while the men fancied that the fascination was deeper and more intrinsic. However, as Heine says, when one's head is knocked off by a ball, one does not lose time in considering the calibre of the cannon. It is quite certain that few of Felise's admirers had full possession of their heads, so it is not worth while to analyze where the pleasing mystery of womanly attractions ended and the charm of costume began. But Miss Clairmont did not linger long to be admired, but seeing Rosamond Clifford at a distance, went up to her hospitably. "I am so glad you came!" said she cordially, for Miss Clifford had half declined to attend the play on account of her deep mourning.

"Oh, Mr. Layton insisted that I should come," returned Rosamond: "he would hear none of my scruples."

"I am so pleased! It would have been a great pity if, when Mr. Layton was so good as to undertake a part, he could not have had you in the audience. I am sure you think he acted well."

"Oh yes: Mr. Layton does everything well. But it was Mr. Frank Layton who pleased me best: he quite touched me at times. In the second act, when you first enter in this dress you are wearing, and he wishes to tell you how beautiful he thinks you, yet fears to offend you, since you are so indifferent to him, it was very delicately done."

Frank was at Miss Clairmont's elbow with a glass of wine, which he now offered to her gravely. "Your aunt says you must drink this," said he, "for you look so particularly gay she is afraid you are fatigued."

"But I never take wine," returned Felise.

"Mrs. Knight said you were to drink

this, and afterward open the ball with me."

"I always obey Aunt Laura," said Felise, and taking the glass she sipped the sherry slowly, making faces of horror the while.

Frank watched her with a grave air. "Perhaps you would prefer to dance with some one else," said he presently. "It is a very good idea to swallow a nauseous draught which is to restore your strength, even if you are obliged to make faces at every sip. But you need not carry your admirable principle of obedience to your aunt so far as to accept me for a partner in a similar spirit."

"What partner could I prefer to you?"

"Judging from my wretched experience of the past week," retorted Frank, "it might be Clifford."

"If you promise not to tease me," observed Felise, "I should like very, very much to dance with you."

She took his arm without waiting for his promise, and they went toward the parlors, already cleared for dancing.

"I heard what Rosamond was saying to you," observed Frank. "Did my acting strike you as anything different from my ordinary manner, Felise?"

"No: several times you said or did something to-night which seemed very familiar—quite your ordinary way of speaking to me."

"You are quite right. The part was hackneyed to me, I have acted it so long: it is a difficult rôle for an impatient man to play, that of an ardent lover who seems to have every right to speak, yet whose confession of love is always tabooed as something quite malapropos. I confess that you too reminded me in the play of your real self—piquant, provoking, dear beyond all words, yet rather pitiless. Still, it came out all right, Felise."

"Dear friend," said she with a bewitching air, "you were not to tease me."

"Don't call me your friend: call things by their right names—I am your lover."

"I really cannot tell," exclaimed Felise with an air of bewilderment, "whether you are repeating lines from the play or not."

"In the play," whispered Frank, "I

am your husband—out of it, your lover. There, now! I can make my position considerably better than that of any other man, let me play which part you will.”

“You are going to be my traveling-companion,” returned Felise with a pensive air, but with no more sign in her aspect of having heard him say anything in particular than if he had murmured a verse from one of the Psalms in her ear. “Think of it: in five days this pleasant idle life will be over, and everybody sets out for a different corner of the world.”

“Four of us, at any rate, keep together,” said Frank; “and I confess that I am heartless enough not to dread this breaking-up at all.”

The quadrille was over, and Jack Clifford came up to Felise and claimed the succeeding waltz. He was quite superb in ruby velvet and ribbons and lace, which he wore as if born to such frippery. “What was Frank Layton saying to you, Miss Clairmont?” he asked. “I have been watching you both, and deciding that he was making himself unnecessarily agreeable.”

“Oh, we naturally talked about you, Jack,” returned Frank with a happy air.

“I doubt it. I think too highly of myself to believe that you could even allude to me without growing green with jealousy. As for me, Mrs. Knight kindly introduced me to two young ladies: neither of them spoke a word, which was delightful, as I rarely get a chance to say as much as I wish. Still, I am exhausted a little, and need to be restored, Miss Clairmont. I am so happy to get back to you! I am so glad the plays are over! In future I need do nothing but devote myself to you.”

Frank walked away.

The party was a gay one, and every one was waltzing save a few people in the hall and reception-room. Miss Clifford was one of these, and was surrounded by a constantly-changing group of men whom Mrs. Knight brought up and introduced. Rosamond would have disclaimed any intention of being either haughty or dull, but she did not find it essential to say anything in particular to these unimportant acquaintances, and few

of them possessed the nerve to go on endeavoring to entertain her when she asked the same question for the third time with the same air of blank indifference as to the answer. She was far enough from being dull, but was a goddess in exile here, for in her own world she was used to being courted, and any monosyllable she might vouchsafe in answer to the conversation offered her was credited with peculiar force and significance. She posed well and carried her habitual air of elegance in her manner, and Saintford people did not impress her as deserving an especial effort on her part. Maurice hung about her for a time: then, finding that she was the object of Mrs. Knight’s hospitable cares, he returned to the parlors and went about searching for Felise, for he had deliberately made up his mind to enjoy one dance with her. She passed him presently with Leslie Wilmot, her great eyes alight with the delirious waltz-music and her cheeks tinged with a pale rose. The band stopped suddenly, and the dancers paused, fanned and chatted. Maurice went up to Felise and whispered in her ear.

“But I am engaged,” she said.

“No matter,” he muttered with a short laugh: “so am I.” The waltz-measure began again. Their eyes met a moment, and hers fell. He put his arm about her and they moved away.

Miss Clifford, while listening to the reminiscences of a deaf old general, suddenly became interested in the talk of two young men in the doorway: one of them was the partner whom Miss Clairmont had just slighted for Maurice.

“I call it nothing but infernal coquetry on her part,” said he.

“Oh, it wasn’t her fault: Senator Layton carries all before him. I wonder how that magnificent Miss Clifford likes his goings on with the little French girl?”

Rosamond’s cold face flushed. Surely, it could not be that Maurice was waltzing! She felt that if it were so, it was a sin against herself which she could never forgive. Not once in all the nine years that she had known him intimately had he ever offered to dance with her. She was outwardly a cold woman, but

she loved Maurice with an intensity he little dreamed of. Long before he had ever met her as more than a mere acquaintance she had flushed and trembled with the hope of one day winning him as her husband. For years her father and Judge Herbert had more than suspected that her feverish interest in certain debates in the House, and earnestness in promoting the success of certain measures, were due to unusual regard for some man concerned in them; and nothing could have pleased them so well as such a choice as she had made with all the world to choose from. But Maurice's steady indifference to marriage might have dismayed a less tenacious woman. Rosamond knew, however, that until he fell in love with some one else she had nothing to fear, but everything to hope, since a union with her would ensure him success whichever way his ambition turned; and his ambition she counted on as his master-motive. She was not deceived: after a time, from his intimacy with her father, Maurice gravitated to her, and a word from her shrewd old friend Judge Herbert made the engagement.

Rosamond had always told herself that she was not loved as other women are loved, but, lofty-minded and passionless herself, she even preferred that her demigod should have none of the weaknesses of lesser men; and for him to become a sighing lover would have been to change the character of their lofty-minded courtship into something commonplace. So long as he cared for no other woman, Rosamond was content with his negative devotion, but the moment a suspicion of his interest in Felise arose in her mind all such philosophy was banished to give way to the sharpest pangs of feminine jealousy. She now determined to see for herself if Maurice were indeed dancing. Young Schuyler—who had been introduced to her half an hour before, and been received with such icy coldness that he was convinced at once that the heiress considered no man born of woman as fit to touch the hem of her garment—was suddenly almost paralyzed by a radiant smile from

Miss Clifford. He advanced tremblingly, for her glance seemed to carry a royal command. Her hauteur had warmed into cordiality, her impassivity into interest. The loftiest among us need occasionally the aid of lesser beings when we have wishes to carry out: even Juno assumes the girdle of Venus.

"It is so warm here," remarked Miss Clifford in her serene, stately way, "I should like to walk a little." She leaned on Schuyler's arm and allowed him to talk to her, and he made himself as agreeable as a man might with half his faculties engaged in making a mental estimate as to what prominent position under government Secretary Clifford would have him appointed to in case he should decide to take advantage of the heiress's evident partiality. His Alnaschar visions fled when suddenly the lady observed in her most freezing tones, "You are very good. You can leave me here, and I will watch the dancers for a little while."

The moment that Miss Clifford entered the door of the parlor she had caught sight of Maurice dancing with Miss Clairmont, and no sooner had she seen him than she felt chilled to the heart. She did not know that look upon his face: his eyes were full of softened fire—his lips wore a languid smile. And ah! how fair her rival was!

Felise happened to look up, and met Miss Clifford's stony stare. "Oh, Mr. Layton," she whispered, "Miss Clifford is standing in the door all alone, and looking at us so strangely. We must not finish this waltz: you must go to her. I know she is very angry with me."

The music stopped opportunely, and the break afforded him an opportunity to offer his arm to his partner and lead her out of the circle of dancers. His features had suddenly become rigid, but he said nothing except to utter an expression of wonder as to the whereabouts of his brother.

"Here is Mr. Clifford coming for me," Felise returned inappositely; and she took his offered arm hurriedly with a trembling sort of smile. Maurice crossed the room and approached Rosamond,

who stood alone, superb and cold as a solitary ice-peak, awaiting him.

"My dear Rosamond," said he, lifting her impassive hand and putting it within his arm, "have you any wish to go home? The carriage is waiting."

She assented frigidly, and without making adieux he brought her scarf, put her in the carriage and they drove to the cottage in silence. On reaching the house they went into the library, where Luigi turned up the lights and drew out easy-chairs for them.

"My dear Rosamond," began Maurice again the moment they were left alone, "since when have you learned to play the basilisk?"

"The basilisk? I do not understand you."

"I never saw a basilisk, but fabulous tradition declares that it glares fixedly and transfixes its unlucky victim. I had much the feeling of such a victim when I met your eyes a quarter of an hour ago."

"You need not exert yourself in the way of wit, Maurice: I do not care to be entertained. I certainly was much astonished to see you dancing, and to hear you spoken of on all sides as Miss Clairmont's professed admirer."

Maurice flushed angrily: "I do not believe any one ever suggested such an absurdity."

"I am not accustomed to having my word questioned. I certainly heard two young men speak of your devotion to Miss Clairmont, and one of them expressed his wonder how I liked your attentions to her."

"I have paid Miss Clairmont no attentions which even a fool could remark on as anything particular."

"You are excited, Maurice. I have seen you in society for twelve years, yet I never knew of your dancing before. But I suppose this sort of thing has been going on all summer."

"I know not how to define anything in the way of expression so vague as 'this sort of thing.' As for my dancing, I never danced with Miss Clairmont before to-night. Since you are measuring with singular regard to details the par-

ticulars of my conduct this summer, my confession shall be absolute, entire: I did one evening waltz with Violet for about thirty seconds."

"How came you to dance to-night?"

Maurice laughed, but there was little enough amusement in his laugh. "The music made me feel like a young fellow perhaps—perhaps I chose to do it. But, my dear, I will say to you that had I seen fit to dance madly all summer with every light-footed girl in Saintford, I was debarred from such diversion by no particular reason. Your own enthusiasm for dancing I have never once thought of restricting, as your exploits in the German during the two last seasons abundantly testify. But excuse me five minutes if you please: I will go up stairs and put on my usual dress: I am sick of masquerading."

He left her, but soon returned, hoping that she would have the good taste to change the subject, but she had, in fact, but just collected her ideas upon her grievance, and was ready fairly to begin. "The truth is," she said, "that you made yourself ridiculous by taking a part in that play."

"I was wishing for a frank, unvarnished piece of criticism upon my acting: hence your ingenuous attack charms me."

"What induced you to take a part?"

"A lifelong but hitherto suppressed histrionic ambition."

"Maurice, you are trying to tease me."

"You certainly are not only trying to annoy me, but are succeeding admirably."

"Of course what I said about the play did not concern your acting. I do not need to tell you that I never in my life saw a better actor. But your dignity and your reputation are too sacred for me to allow you to trifle with them."

"So far in my life, dear, I have supported my own dignity and made my own reputation."

Rosamond broke down like a weaker woman, and, leaning over the arm of her chair, buried her face in her handkerchief. "I have been engaged to you for eighteen months," she said presently

in a choked voice, "but you have never asked to dance with me: you have never offered me any of those little attentions a woman likes to receive from the man she—she loves. I have let you take your own course, because I believed you too proud and indifferent to be the slave of any woman; and now—and now—"

It was a moment before he replied, and in that moment many things had been revealed to him. Instantaneously his mind reverted to the monotony of his long engagement to Rosamond. She was right: he had never surrounded her with that atmosphere of affectionate demonstrations which other engaged lovers delight in, and had excused himself for his coldness by remembering that Rosamond was neither youthful nor tender—that her mind as well as his own was taken up with more important things. To-night, the moment the dance-music began, a resistless impulse had seized him to waltz, yet he had often enough heard strains of more enticing harmony without feeling the inspiration of any such sweet delirium. He had longed to dance with Felise. For the first time he had clasped her hand, his arm had been about her form, so swaying, so slender, yet dimpling and delicious in the exquisite and almost infantile softness of its curves. Had he not danced to-night he would have felt that he had not lived: he was at fever-heat yet with the thought of those too brief minutes. Yet no similar fantasy had ever possessed him in the past, and he had watched Rosamond's blonde flower-crowned head gyrating against a thousand manly shoulders, first and last, without one feeling of jealousy or an impulse to waltz with her himself. For the first time he felt that he had failed in his relations to his promised wife; yet had he ever, even in offering himself, professed to regard her with passionate fondness? He had only asked her promise to be his wife, and their habit had been a calm, satisfying, equal-minded companionship which discountenanced roses and raptures. But comradeship between man and woman was impossible, it seemed. What a wretched mistake for a man to impose tasks upon himself!

"My dear friend," said he kindly, putting his hand affectionately upon Rosamond's coronet of braids with a vague wonder going on mentally as to the secret of the difference in physical attraction between women, "if I have ever failed in the attentions it seems now that you wished me to pay you from the beginning of our engagement, my excuse must be in great measure my misconception of your character. You seem to me so pure and cold that it has been natural for me to treat you *en reine*. As to the absurd question of my dancing, you know perfectly well what my social habits are in Washington: a thousand other interests engross and distract me, and if I walk through the rooms once at any ball or reception except your own, I consider that my duty is done. Here it is quite different. I have, to my great unhappiness, had no opportunity to carry out the plans for the summer which you know lay so near my heart, and, grieved, disappointed and idle, I have amused myself with whatever came uppermost here among Frank's circle. . . . Come, now, I hear the carriage at the gate. Forgive my absurdities to-night, and I promise you I will neither dance nor play again. The penalty is more severe than the pleasure is sweet."

Rosamond looked up at him with affection in her glance, and he kissed her and sat down beside her. She moved toward him and placed her hand in his. It was rather in his way: there needs to be a certain rapture about a hand-clasp to ensure any pleasure in its indefinite continuance, and Maurice felt very stupidly calm, and may have been glad of the relief afforded by the entrance of Frank and the Merediths.

Jack Clifford had not come back with the rest of the party, but had remained to talk over the play with Miss Clairmont. However, that was nothing new, and Frank need not have looked grave. The people at the cottage, who might have been expected to see the young man occasionally, since he was staying in the same house, were now quite accustomed to his absence between cock-crow and midnight.

## CHAPTER XIX.

ATTENTIVE though Jack Clifford had been to Miss Clairmont before the play, such devotion was meagre compared with that which he displayed during the last few days of his prolonged visit. It was his habit, to be sure, to make his flirtations apparent to the eyes of other men: he was too liberal to keep his treasure of feeling invisible, guarding it under lock and key, and liked somewhat to flaunt his good-fortune. But nothing could have been more unlike Felise than to accept such a parade of ostentatious homage, and everybody began to ask everybody else what his or her opinions were on the result of the affair. Frank Layton was, however, the exception: the subject was avoided before him, and he made no allusion to it until one night he looked into his brother's room a little past eleven o'clock. The day had been a gay one: a *matinée dansante* in the neighborhood had been followed by a quiet dinner at the cottage. Felise had remained through the evening and sung duets with Jack Clifford, who was now escorting her home. Frank had apparently been in the best of spirits, and had never been more amusing, yet when he entered Maurice's room he was silent, and leaned against the window-casement the picture of dejection.

"Going to bed, Frank?" inquired Maurice, looking up from his writing.

"Yes, I shall go to bed: I have no interest in meeting Clifford after he comes back."

"Tell me," exclaimed Maurice, abruptly wheeling round in his chair, "how do you stand with Miss Clairmont at present?"

"The position is so clear that the most careless looker-on may define it. She will not see anybody, hear anybody, nor, I presume, think of anybody, but Clifford."

Maurice shouted with laughter at the peculiar misery of Frank's tone.

"I am so glad if it amuses you," said Frank, stroking his moustache with his most superb air. "I confess I see nothing in it to laugh at. Jack is twelve years younger than I, and handsomer than I,

with plenty of dash and go about him. He may be just the husband for her, but, by Heaven! I don't want him to have her."

"Jack is young enough and handsome enough and clever enough, but, I assure you, Miss Clairmont no more thinks of marrying him than she does of marrying Wilmot."

"Then why does she encourage him?" said Frank.

Maurice laughed again: "Sit down, Frank, take a fan and get cool. It *does* seem cruel. Here you are, rich, handsome, favored of all the gods, yet—O mortal Dellius!—the day of your happiness is overcast. You invited Jack for two days, and he has remained two weeks: he has established himself in your house as if it were his own—smokes your cigars—drinks your wine, and criticises it—drives your horses, and lames them—and, worst of all, falls in love with the only woman in the world you ever tried to win."

"I mind none of these things," returned Frank, laughing in spite of himself. "What I deplore is her bad taste in fancying him."

"Bah! As the women say, she cares not a pin for him. She does not lack shrewdness, and knows the sound of a penny trumpet from the note of a silver clarion. Jack's cheap flourishes amuse her. When she is in love she will not sing sentimental duets with the object of her fondness and laugh at his phrasing; nor, when she starts to go home, will she be so careful to tuck up her flounces all around, and then decline to take his arm because she does not wish to crush her sleeves, etc., as she did half an hour ago."

"I cannot understand her," said Frank vehemently. "She knows my feelings for her: I will swear she likes me. Perhaps that is just the point where the solution of the problem turns. It may be that with all her trust and faith in me—her fondness even in a childish way—she stops short of the feeling which will allow her to yield to my wishes. Perhaps I inspire friendship—no more. I cannot, I will not, accept her friendship:

it may be sweet, it may be precious, but it is not enough for me."

Maurice had turned back to his papers: his hand trembled a little as he assorted them. "Mark my words, Frank," he replied: "if you are patient for a few weeks, your suit will finally prosper. I am certain that in her heart she at this moment is decided that you are to be her husband."

Something in his brother's tone convinced Frank that he had fatigued him. "Forgive me," he exclaimed, pausing by the table as he strode about the room: "you must be very tired of my unlucky love-affair. A man should keep his feelings to himself, for the same lights and shadows, though they fall on us both, fall with too much difference for either of us to measure the brightness or gloom of the other. Well, I will go to bed and try to be patient. It is a little singular: I have always told myself that I would not fall in love until all conditions were favorable. I never approved of the waste of feeling, energy, hope and strength which forms the bitterness of disappointment when a man experiences a reverse. It did seem to me that little girl might love me. Why, a dozen times this summer, before I went to Newport, I felt that if I were even a trifle peremptory with her I could have put out my hand to claim her: she was like a child with me, and obeyed me gladly. But I have a horror of being ungenerous: I asked so much of her, I hated to hurry her."

"Frank, your modesty humiliates one."

"I have little reason for any particular self-respect just now. I look at you, and compare myself with your dignity, your manhood, your calm possession of your reason, while here am I the slave of a little girl—beautiful, to be sure, but absolutely pitiless—consuming myself in jealousy because she encourages another man—unable to sleep for thinking of her—given over to ennui in her absence, in her presence hearing with her ears, seeing with her eyes! Pshaw! I despise myself. You make something of your life: I am throwing mine out of the window. Now and then I call reason to my aid, and reach a point of elevation which

makes me smile at the insignificance of my hopes and fears. I feel indignant that when there are worthy interests and ambitions in the world, I should be treading the crooked paths a lover must take if he meanders about in the track of a woman. I can quite understand, Maurice, that you, with settled aims and a wide career of energies, can little appreciate a state of feeling like mine."

Maurice laid a heavy hand on Frank's arm and looked up: the eyes of the brothers met, and each smiled. "I am not quite a bundle of parchments yet," said the elder, "and your hopes of winning Miss Clairmont are sacred and dear to me. But I do think it a pity for you to become the prey of restless fears. I am absolutely certain that that mocking, eluding little goddess will finally be changed into a tender, blushing mortal maiden in your arms. I really long to see you happy, Frank."

They looked at each other silently for a moment, and Frank pushed aside the dark curls from his brother's forehead with something of the demonstrative fondness of their boyhood. Then turning away, he paced the room slowly. "It is not altogether that I want love," said he after a long silence: "I want happiness. I ask questions of life now: What does it tend to? What means this tremendous and ever-increasing aggregation of human existences born for desire and struggle? I have become a little morbid in the loneliness of the hurrying years, and I need a daily life which will make me happy in the present, instead of leaving me time to analyze the characters of men and the worth of their destinies until my vision gets so keen that I grow into the wide circle of the world's forces, and the chances of the individual unit, the single mortal life, seem as insignificant as those of a coral insect. Yes, a tardy fulfillment of conditions has at last offered me a glimpse of the woman I can love devotedly. I want her by my side: I want caresses and the pressure of helpless baby hands to teach me the sacredness and worth of private individual existence. A man does not question the eternal fitness of things while he pats the

rosy upturned faces of his children, Maurice. I have somehow missed ambition, and my hopes are of the homely, everyday joys that make a fellowship for me with the humblest man alive. For you, there—"

"Don't, for God's sake!" muttered Maurice hoarsely, a spasm crossing his face. "We are all alike, we men: we all want our little snatch at personal happiness. Let us lose it, and what remains to us for evermore? Lucky for some of us if there is a butterfly we may take the pains to chase. Constituted as the world is, some one must live in the tumults of busy life—must believe that political power will repay him for his lonely position, with its inevitable ingratitude of friends, its unworthy calumnies, its incessant and perplexing fatigues; but don't for a moment believe that any man is satisfied to live on husks." He had spoken hurriedly, as if in terrible earnest, but no sooner were the words uttered than he laughed again. "There, Frank!" he cried, in a tone of banter, "your sentiment and your melancholy have so inoculated me that I too am morbid. Let's cheer up. Hist! there's Jack down stairs again!"

Luigi tapped at the door, and brought a message to his master that Mr. Clifford wanted to see him.

"Show him up here," said Maurice. "I suppose, Frank, he wants a cigar in your company."

Jack entered, looking as fresh as if it were noonday instead of midnight. "The house was so quiet I feared everybody was already in bed," he remarked gayly, "and it seemed a pity, for the moonlight is divine. Had not Mrs. Knight been cruel enough to come out and carry her niece away, I suspect we should have sat on the steps for two hours yet."

Frank smiled, but what a smile! The tortured smile such smiles.

"You indulge, Jack, in aerial perspective," observed Maurice.

"Who would not, old fellow, after walking home with Miss Clairmont? It is delightful to lose one's wits, even to tell lies, when one enjoys my present agreeable tumult of mind. Confess,

Maurice, that, engaged to the queen of women although you may be, you find that beautiful girl a trifle bewildering."

"I am a hardened lawyer, and beautiful girls are not my *métier*. As for Miss Clairmont, she is very pretty, very clever, very good, but her strong point is that she is—very charming. Now, Jack, what do you want at this time of night? I have two hours' work before me yet to get this ready for the early mail. Sit down and smoke quietly if you will."

"Smoke? Good Heavens! do you suspect me of an inclination to smoke in Saintford after seeing Miss Clairmont? I never smoke except when I require some simple form of consolation; which, thank Goodness! I don't need at present. I came up here to ask a favor of your brother.—Frank, my boy"—and he clapped his shoulder persuasively—"do a fellow a service, will you not? Lend me your guitar: I want to fill the night with music and all that sort of thing. In short, I want to serenade Miss Clairmont."

"The devil you do!" ejaculated Frank with a laugh that showed his handsome teeth. "Clifford, you are absolutely the most deliciously-impudent dog I ever came across. Certainly, take my guitar—take anything which you fancy may make you irresistible to Miss Clairmont. Say, shall I not drive you up there and hold the horses quiet in the road while you sing beneath her window?"

"But I am not sure which is her window," exclaimed Jack. "Can't you tell me? Once I serenaded a lady's-maid by mistake, and it took me six months to get over the laugh against me."

Frank looked at his brother with a droll grimace. "Would you tell him, Maurice? Where do the duties of hospitality end and the rights of an unhappy host begin?—But I'll do my best for you, Jack. Wait a moment." He went to his own room and presently returned with a guitar and a Spanish cloak. Jack grasped the former and ran his fingers across the strings, then threw the mantle over his shoulders. "You *look* the gallant, at all events," resumed Frank in his easiest way. "Now, then, when you

get to the house, go to the right, and on the south side are three windows opening on a light balcony, just above six blossoming oleanders. Those are Miss Clairmont's rooms."

"Upon my word, Frank Layton, you're simply the best fellow I ever came across! I swear to you, you shall be my best man at the wedding when I win her."

"Let me confide to you, Jack, my profound conviction that at her wedding I shall be the *best* man."

And all three men roared with laughter, and laughed so loud and long that Mrs. Meredith in a cambric and lace peignoir, and with her blonde hair in curl-papers, peeped in at the door to inquire what the joke was.

#### CHAPTER XX.

JACK CLIFFORD had begun a flirtation with Felise because he never lost an opportunity of perfecting himself in his favorite science, but he was startled after a time at finding himself unusually in earnest. He had never considered himself a marrying man unless events should throw some great heiress in his way, for he was comparatively poor. Still, he had been born lucky, and possessed a comfortable conviction that his high individual value in the world necessitated a logical sequence of agreeable issues which would ensure his always being sufficiently well off to live like the people with whom he was most familiar, and who enjoyed the correct thing both in establishment and position. Hence, in the event of his settling earlier in life than he had ever intended, he experienced no distrust of the future.

The morning after his serenade he made his way to Mrs. Knight's as soon as he had finished his breakfast, and by astonishing good-fortune found Miss Clairmont alone, as Mrs. Knight had driven over to Bridgeford to do some shopping. Felise was very busy over a bit of cambric, around which she was frilling laces.

"What skillful little fingers you have!" said Jack, making this employment an

excuse for bending very close to her. "What are you making?"

"A little cap for my aunt," returned Felise. "She wears things like these in the morning. Tell me if it is pretty." And she put it over her own golden hair.

"Take it off! please take it off!" he cried with a gesture of horror. "You look as if you were married, so many brides affect that sort of matronliness."

"I do not wonder," said Felise, running over to the glass to admire herself, "for it is very becoming."

"Under certain circumstances," remarked Jack with peculiar force of meaning, "I might find that sort of thing ravishing upon your head. But my first instinct was one of profound anguish. It made my blood run cold: I felt as if you were Madame Somebody-else."

"Ah!" sighed Felise, "I have positively lost three minutes, and I am so busy to-day! I have so many little trifles to prepare before I start on our journey to-morrow. You go as far as New York with us?"

"Yes, as far as New York—no farther. Indeed, I have no right to waste a day in doing so much, but I must have the pleasure of a little journey with—with your party. Then early next morning I set out for the White Mountains to escort my mother to the next shrine of her summer pilgrimage. She has written, imploring me to come for her, every day for two weeks, for she has been perishing with the cold. But what is a freezing mother to me when I have a chance of seeing you?"

"What a monster!"

"I am what you make me," retorted Jack. "Hitherto I have been the ornament of American youth. Other mothers have sighed, 'Would that I too had such a son!' Hereafter, I may be obliged to point a different moral and adorn a different tale. Still, now that you are going away, and since Frank Layton does not invite me to join his party, I will do penance and return to my filial duties. Think of it! Only forty-eight hours more of your society, and then a dismal blank! What may I carry away of yours, Miss Clairmont?"

"What do you wish?" asked Felise carelessly, balancing the trifle of a cap on her hand and critically surveying it with her head on one side.

"Ah! I ask for your heart: nothing else would satisfy me."

"My heart?" and she raised her great pensive eyes to him. "But there was to be no question of hearts between us, you remember."

"But, by Heaven! there is, though!" he exclaimed, starting forward with a new look on his handsome face.

"Not in the least," said she, quite unembarrassed. "You told me when you came that your only wish in life was to have a fresh flirtation every two weeks, and for such a man there can be no question of hearts. So please, Mr. Clifford, let us talk of something else."

He was looking at her with a flushed face. "I have a heart," he returned in a low voice, "and at present it makes me suffer keenly. May I not talk about it?"

"Most certainly not. Interesting although it may be to others, it can never be any concern of mine. You were to amuse me, you know, and hitherto you have amused me admirably. Go on talking nonsense for two days more: then, when next we meet—"

"You will be engaged to Frank Layton."

"Now you are not amusing."

Jack tried to rally and speak, but he felt conscious of a sensation in the organ whose mention she had interdicted of positive bodily pain. "I think relations are so heartless!" he resumed, however, presently. "Were I not obliged to conduct my mother to Sharon, I should certainly insist upon taking this journey with you."

Felise raised her eyebrows and puckered her lips firmly.

"Don't laugh," he exclaimed with vehement feeling in his tone. "Had you the faintest idea of what these weeks have been to me, you would at least pity me, now that I discover they were to you nothing but a fragment of your summer pleasure."

He was silent for a few moments, then went on: "Have I ever spoken of my

friend Freilgrath? He was a charming fellow, a Dane, attached to the Danish embassy. One winter we saw each other constantly, and decided that we must spend our summer together. He had not gone into society in Washington, as he was in deep mourning for his mother, to whom he was passionately attached; hence, until we reached Saratoga in July, American social life was a sealed book for him. We arrived at our hotel at seven o'clock one evening, dressed, dined and went into the parlors, where I introduced him to my cousin, Kate King of New York, a girl of twenty-eight or more, who had been a wonderful belle for ten years, but was now on the point of marriage with Colonel Arbuthnot. Friedrich was also solemnly betrothed to a little flaxen-haired cousin at home: accordingly, without telling either of the engagement of the other, I considered them good company for each other. I heard the story of their acquaintance from both sides afterward, hence am in a position to tell you all about it.

"Friedrich looked about him and saw a hundred beautiful girls talking, waltzing and promenading with gentlemen, and he remarked to Kate that American women evidently married very young.

"'But these girls are not married,' she returned: 'there are not more than a dozen married ladies on the floor.' Then he suggested that they were engaged, for they all had such easy, gracious manners: they were quite unlike his idea of *jeunes filles*. But Kate assured him they were not even engaged.

"'But,' he exclaimed, quite mystified—'but they are so brilliant, so enticing, yet neither married nor betrothed! How dare they be at once so confiding and so beautiful?' Kate laughed, and told him he was severe upon our American habit of flirting.

"'What is that—to flirt?' he inquired; and he assured her on his honor that he had no idea of the meaning of the word.

"'To flirt,' she explained, 'is to play at being in love, without any consequences interfering with the enjoyment.'

"Friedrich was enchanted. 'What!' he cried. 'You make sweet speeches, you

look tenderness unutterable, you waltz together, you have long conversations the most spirituel; yet it is all but an amusement? Mon dieu! how ravishing! The flowers of love without the thorns of passion! the sparkle of the wine without the dregs! Ah, that I too might flirt!

"And why," demanded Kate, "should you not flirt like everybody else?"

"Who would flirt with me?" he asked in a melancholy tone; but seeing indulgence in her face, he added, "Would you—so beautiful, so surrounded, so distinguished—would you teach me the charming science?"

"Kate frankly consented, taking it, she affirmed, for granted that I had informed him of her engagement. She was a little proud that she had at once attached him to her, for he was an elegant, accomplished fellow, with manners bearing that court stamp in which Europeans so excel us; and they really went in for a tremendous flirtation, and for more than three weeks were entirely devoted to each other. Freilgrath was a regular Teuton, climaxed by Danish genius—at once sentimental and passionate, learned and ingenuous. I fancy that Kate with all her experience had never before seen a man with either so much freshness or so much fire in him.

"His holiday was over at last, and he was recalled to the embassy. When he tried to bid Kate good-bye his feelings overwhelmed him, and he confessed himself madly in love with her. Kate endeavored to control his passionate outburst of words. 'You know we were merely to play at making love?' said she laughing. But the poor fellow had long since passed the stage when mimic passion swayed him, and he poured forth a torrent of imperious entreaty that she would be his wife.

"Kate was obliged to rally all her forces. 'I insist that you shall say no more,' said she, 'for I have no right to listen to such a declaration from you. The terms of our compact were so clear that I cannot feel myself to blame. We have had a few pleasant weeks together, of which I shall always think with pleasure—perhaps also with some pain. But

if you wait until to-morrow I shall introduce you to Colonel Arbuthnot, who has just arrived from Europe, and whom I am to marry in six weeks.' Poor Freilgrath!" and Jack sighed.

"Yes, poor Freilgrath! What became of him?"

"He wrote home to be recalled, and as soon as his place was filled returned to Copenhagen. I saw him with his wife last year: she is a dowdy little person, but of noble family and an heiress."

"Did he speak of Miss King?"

"Not by name, but he remarked to me that America seemed full of charming girls. 'But,' he added, 'they are, for me, *trop spirituelles*. I have thought,' he went on profoundly, 'how pleasant it must be to lead the life of English and American unmarried women. But, mon Dieu! how do the men who marry them afterward like it?'"

Felise flushed scarlet. "I fear," she said with some state, "that you have been telling me a story with a moral."

"No, Miss Clairmont, for you are far, very far, from being an American girl. Still, for me, you are *trop spirituelle*, and the sooner I go and freeze on the top of Mount Washington the safer it will be for me in my present state of feeling. Still, don't altogether forget me."

"Of course I shall not forget you. Why may we not be good friends? It often occurs to me that men are very lavish toward women of feelings which give us no comfort, while it is hard for any of you to yield us frank friendliness and sympathy. I am capable myself of being an excellent friend."

"I mistrust my capacity for subsiding into a calm, wise friend," returned Jack, biting his lip as he gazed into her face, a spasm contracting his heart. "Some women inspire very temperate feelings, but I doubt if you will ever have many safe friends: you will make many laments over the unprofitable devotion which men offer, for the moment any one of us sees you he becomes your lover."

"You must say nothing more in this strain," returned Felise with freezing coldness, "or we shall not get on at all."

"Agreed, then," said Jack, kneeling at her feet. "I vow to be your friend and nothing more—if I can help it. We are both young, and shall probably meet frequently in society. Let us swear an eternal friendship."

"With all my heart," said Felise in her sweetest voice; and bending toward him she gave him her hand with a kind look, for she was startled at the sight of tears in his eyes. As quick as lightning he raised it to his lips and held it there for a long moment. And Felise suffered it, for she really liked him, and felt grateful to him, and knew that she deserved blame.

8

When Clifford finally looked up he caught sight of a white face staring in at the doorway. He was altogether heart-broken that Miss Clairmont had rejected his suit, yet was nevertheless sufficiently inclined for mischief to be pleased with the tangle of misunderstanding which he saw ahead. The face vanished from the doorway almost before he had really seen it, and he did not mention the matter to Felise.

"Now, Miss Clairmont," said he, rising, "I will try to be myself again. But what is the most melancholy song you can sing?"



## PART VI.

### CHAPTER XXI.

THIS was the final evening of the Merediths' stay in Saintford, and Frank Layton was to give a small dinner-party, succeeded by a general reception and ball. Thus, when Maurice descended from his room at six o'clock, he found that the house was decorated with flowers and that the ladies wore their diamonds. "You are all very magnificent," said he. "I had quite forgotten it was a party-night.—Luigi, will you go to my room and bring me a pair of gloves?"

"That is Maurice to the life, Mrs. Meredith," remarked Rosamond. "I may tell him every day for two weeks that I wish him to remember a certain engagement: then finally am rewarded when the time arrives by the discovery that he is shut up for the night in some odious committee-room."

"Rosamond dear," returned Maurice blandly, "under the circumstances I really think it ought to be proper for you to have two husbands, one of whom should have nothing to do save to remember dinner-parties and receptions, and make himself generally agreeable."

"What have you been doing all day, Maurice?—Mrs. Meredith—will you believe it?—this is actually the first time I have seen him since yesterday."

"That is not my fault, Rosamond, for I came down at one o'clock for the express purpose of asking you to drive with me, and you had gone out yachting with Violet and Wilmot."

"I have a letter from papa," said Rosamond, "and you may as well read it yourself, for it is filled with messages for you."

Maurice eagerly seized the letter, and advancing down the long flower-decked parlors, met his brother entering. He was in full evening-dress, with a tuberoses in his button-hole, and was drawing on his gloves; but although there was nothing picturesque or disheveled about him,

but quite the reverse, Maurice stared at him in dismay, for he perceived something unusual and chilling in his appearance.

"How are you, Frank?" said he, arresting him. "What have you been doing all day?"

"I have been in my room," returned the other. "To tell the truth, I am not quite well."

"I should think not," exclaimed Maurice earnestly. "What is it? You look wretchedly." He put his arm within his brother's and led him into the study.

Frank closed the door quietly behind them as they entered. "I am ashamed that I am such a boy as to carry a signal of distress at my masthead," he remarked coolly, with a faint smile flickering across his face. "Since you have found me out, I may as well tell you at once that Miss Clairmont has accepted Clifford."

"What infernal nonsense, Frank! Who dared say such a thing?"

"'Tis no hearsay," rejoined Frank, with entire calmness. "I went to call on her at noon, and walked in without ringing, as I am in the habit of doing when I hear voices inside. Jack was—Never mind. It is their secret, but there was no mistaking the position of affairs. It seems to me a hurried courtship, yet she liked him from the first. Not once since he came with me from Newport has her manner been what it was before. I think it highly improbable that so sudden an engagement should be announced at present, but I can only be thankful that accident has given me the key to the problem which was torturing me."

Maurice groaned heavily as if in mortal pain, and sinking into a chair leaned his elbows on the table and buried his face in his hands.

"At three o'clock," continued Frank in the same cold, trained voice, "Clifford came to my room and asked if he could take my chestnut to ride to Bridgeford—"

the other horses were all in use. He explained that he wanted to get Miss Clairmont a bouquet. I told him of course to ride Max, but that he could find no such flowers as Powers could pick for him and arrange under his direction. 'Thank you, old fellow!' said he laughing oddly, 'but under the circumstances I should prefer to-day not to present your flowers to Miss Clairmont, for in so many other ways I am indebted to my enemy for aid and comfort, I am shamefaced at accepting any further favors.' I assure you there was no mistaking either his words or his flushed, excited manner."

Maurice had kept silence, but he looked up now: the veins in his forehead were knotted and swollen, and he showed signs of some powerful emotion.

Frank smoothed out the broad high brow with a touch as gentle as a woman's. "Dear Maurice," said he, "I love you for taking my misfortune so to heart, but you must not. I find myself stronger than I had thought: the first horror of it is over, and now, 'being gone, I am a man again.'"

Still, Maurice did not speak. Luigi came to the door and announced the arrival of guests, and, making a supreme effort, he wrenched himself from his chair and stood up. "Go into the parlor, Frank," he said in his usual voice. "I must read this letter, but will follow you in three minutes."

Frank walked away slowly, while Maurice mechanically opened the sheet and read the four pages without mentally taking in a single word written there.

Rosamond came in to look for him before he had finished. "I was not certain," she exclaimed, laughing, "but that you had forgotten all about the dinner again. Everybody has come, and all are down except Jack. What a man he is for being behindhand! Papa always says he was born just half an hour too late ever to amount to anything."

Maurice burst out laughing. "I think not," said he—"I think not."

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Rosamond, unaware that she had said anything droll. "I wish you could have seen Frank greet Miss Clairmont. What

manners he has! Charles Lamb would have written an essay about them."

They were entering the parlors, and Maurice left Miss Clifford and went about speaking to the guests. Felise was sitting in the bay-window on the crimson sofa, and the rich color threw out the white and azure of her dress in such vivid contrast that he seemed to see nothing else, and his eyes felt dazzled as he walked the length of the rooms toward her. He only bowed before her in his grandest manner—he was too furiously angry with her to speak—and in return for her uplifted, deprecating glance he gave her a look which made her spirit quail within her: then took his stand by one of the pillars and watched her closely. Jack entered almost at the same moment that Maurice walked away, and sat down beside her with his most successful air, and the deep blush and downcast eyes which greeted him were quite enough to vindicate Frank's theory, unless one knew that the aching heart of this little girl was wildly questioning sense and memory to discover the meaning of the angry gleam in Maurice's eyes. Frank had himself arranged the seats of the guests at table, and Jack carried off Felise with a great flourish.

Dinners at the cottage were always judiciously ordered and exquisitely served, and no one could find any fault to-night in either *menu* or service; but still something was lacking, and almost every one was conscious of the tedium of the long courses. Frank was never a great talker, but usually he had the art of putting his guests at their best and promoting conversation: to-night he exerted himself more than usual, but his manner was grave and chilling. As for Maurice, he spoke not a word unless he was pointedly addressed, but looked straight before him, as completely indifferent as if he had been a painted portrait. It happened that in Secretary Clifford's letter there had been some items of political news displeasing to his party, and Rosamond remarked to some one that Mr. Layton was quite put out about the nominations: accordingly, no one wondered at his gloom, and he was allowed to gaze

undisturbed into the pyramid of flowers which formed the central table-ornament.

But a band was playing in the hall and covered the silences with music, and most of the party gossiped and prattled, buzzing airy flirtation and gay talk around the table. Jack Clifford was in the highest spirits, although there could be no sensible reason for such elation, as the real truth of the situation was that he was a young man violently in love with a charming girl who was indifferent to him. Still, although to-morrow he expected to be the most wretched of men, there was meanwhile a present which seemed to him half like success, since this buoyant-hearted young gentleman saw plainly that the two Laytons at least believed him to be engaged to Miss Clairmont. Frank might carry off all the honors to-morrow, but he could at least make a glorious parade of them to-night; so he forgot the immaterial fact of his sore defeat, and wholly exasperated every man at table by his wit and good-humor.

When the ladies left the table both Maurice and Clifford sprang up to open the door for them. Jack returned to his seat, but the other, with a nod toward Frank, left the room by another door and entered the study, where he threw himself into a large arm-chair. The room was not lighted, for it was never open to company, and night had come in and covered it with a darkness and gloom which at first seemed to Maurice a pleasant repose to his fatigued spirit. For a time he remained immovable: his mood was both bitter and hopeless, and it was a comfort to be free to look his anger in the face. But suddenly some thought smote him, and he sprang up aroused for action. Frank's little King Charles, Ton-Ton, had crept into his lap. Maurice thrust his hand into an inner pocket and drew out a little pearl-colored glove—who knows with what wild folly kissed and cherished?—and held it out to the spaniel. "Go find her, Ton-Ton," said he—"go find her."

The dog sniffed the glove, then barked to be let into the passage. Maurice opened the door and followed him down the hall—not toward the drawing-room,

but into a little alcove-parlor under the staircase. It was generally used by Luigi as his retiring-room, but to-night had been fitted up as a boudoir and hung with rose-colored chintzes and lighted by globe lights, now burning dimly. Maurice had tested the spaniel's sagacity before, and followed him unhesitatingly into this pretty out-of-the-way nook. Ton-Ton was right: Miss Clairmont had chosen this place for her retirement until the ball opened.

She looked up at Maurice timidly as he entered, then bending down caressed the dog, without finding courage to utter a single word. He looked at her steadfastly, and she was by far too beautiful to-night to be regarded coldly. "Child! child!" said he, "why have you done this thing?"

She lifted her face with a frightened air. "Violet went up stairs to direct her packing," she returned with an air of deprecation, "and I pretended to go with her, but came here instead; for indeed, Mr. Layton, I feel miserably tired."

He waved his hand imperiously, then sat down close beside her and spoke in the lowest voice close to her ear. His face worked with strong emotion: "Did I give you up for this? Did I go through that terrible struggle for this? I thought I was sacrificing my own longing for you that you might have a better fate than I could give you. You cost me a terrible price, but for Frank's sake I was able to pay it. Now you throw his happiness away. I could hate you for it!"

She had turned to a deathly paleness, and stared at him dumbly with distended eyes.

"How dared you?" he asked, looking at her with a face which grew every moment sterner and more rigid. "Did you wish to punish me? Have you thought it so cruel that I lingered in your neighborhood that you wished to torture me thus? Do you believe that I would have remained here a moment after that morning unless I had been bound by the presence of another to spend this weary interval in Saintford? Had I had my own will, I should have gone long since far, far away, where I might have found

some chance of forgetting every scrap, every shred, of my memories of you."

"I cannot understand you," she faltered.

"You have accepted Clifford," returned Maurice with a glance of anger and scorn.

"Oh no," she returned hurriedly: "how could you believe it? I could not think of such a folly."

"Thank God! thank God!" cried Maurice, falling on his knees and clasping his arms about her. "Darling child, I loved you so—loved you so, it killed me to think you had given yourself to anybody else."

He had strained Felise to his breast, and her face was hidden from him. He leaned his head over her, and his lips touched her curls again and again. Great shivers ran through him and tears started to his eyes. If he felt happiness in this mad avowal, it was an agony of happiness. "I don't need to have you tell me you love me, child," he murmured. "Ah, how my arms ached to clasp you that morning! Oh, Felise, what have I not suffered these two weeks! You don't know—your little innocent heart could not guess—what imperishable feelings you put into my heart. I could not rest. Time and time again I have written all through the night to keep you out of my mind. But now we will be happy—we will be happy: come what may, we will be happy—won't we, dear?"

She moved uneasily within his arms.

"What is it, my darling?"

"Oh, Mr. Layton, this is so wrong! Oh, let me go."

He unfastened his strong clasp upon her, and she withdrew hastily from him, but their eyes met and could not part.

"You love me," said he with a smile that thrilled her. "You need not deny it—you love me! There is but one heaven on earth for you, and that is in my arms." The blood surged to her face and her eyes drooped. "Look up at me again," he added, and she obeyed him. His face glowed with ardor and pleasure: there was such entire command in his glance that until he spoke again she experienced

the bliss of joyful irresponsibility: she did not analyze this state of semi-conscious, languid happiness, but no magic potion could have made her more completely the slave of his will. "You are mine," said he again, but very gravely now. "You are mine. But close your eyes, Felise: they rob me of my senses," he added with a trace of struggle in his voice. "Will you let me kiss you? Think before you answer, child; for, remember, once let me kiss you and I shall give you no power to recede. I dare not kiss you, then let you go again. Decide our destiny once for all, for once my lips on yours, you shall be my wife, though it costs us both our salvation."

Her color faded. "You are engaged to marry another woman," she murmured with a convulsive effort. "We can be nothing to each other—never—never—never!"

He restrained himself only by a violent effort. She little knew what a reckless, desperate soul looked at her hungrily from his gleaming eyes. Primitive and lawless instincts almost controlled him, let him govern himself with a strong hand as he might. "Let me tell you exactly how we stand," he answered her in a voice full of pain he could not control. "It does seem to me that man was never bound as I am bound, but at one word from you I am ready to break my bonds and be free. Frank loves you tenderly, but that is not all: the worst is that he has confided to me his sacreddest innermost feelings regarding you, I listening all the time to him with this traitor's heart. To betray him, to win you away from him, would be the deed of a dastard. But if you loved me, dear—I told him—it was last night I told him—that he was sure to win you at last—that I hoped to see you his wife. What those words cost me! You see, child," he went on in an agitated whisper, bending close over the form he dared not touch, "I loved you from the very first, but I told myself it was but reading a charming page, but listening to an exquisite tune, until I found out that you loved me as well." She shuddered and moved away from him. "Until then," he pursued ve-

hemently, "I had not once thought of wronging Frank; but that knowledge woke up the demon within me. I could give up the woman I loved, but oh—my God!—how could I resign the woman who loved me?"

He was silent for a moment, then continued: "Besides Frank, there is Rosamond. She is worthy of any man's worship, but we were not made for each other. To renounce her would be to renounce my public life. But that is nothing, less than nothing, to me now. Have we not our own lives to live? Let us lose the world: it can but give us the chance to love each other the more. I cannot, like Frank, offer you a fortune. In truth, I am a poor man, for I have resigned my profession: my political prospects will be hazarded, for my most powerful friends will be estranged, and I must go to work anew. But I am certain you will not feel unhappy in bearing for a time comparative poverty and obscurity with me. Do not be afraid of any trouble and confusion for yourself in engaging yourself to me. You shall know nothing of any annoyance. Just put your hand in mine, give me your lips once, and we will part for one month. Then I will return to claim you. There is my hand, Felise, waiting for yours."

She clenched her hands together in her lap: her face was buried among the sofa-pillows.

"Are you afraid of poverty with me?" he asked.

"No, no."

"I could make you so happy! You know little of the heart and soul in me which love for you has aroused. When I am once unshackled you will begin to have some idea of the Maurice Layton who loves you. I could make your life pass like a dream of enchantment, Felise."

"Do not tempt me," she cried despairingly: "do not dare to tempt me!"

"God forbid that I should tempt you! Have I tempted you? Ask your heart if I am not losing my own cause because I want to do nothing, to compel you to nothing, which your own reason does not approve. I will let you take no step blind-

ly, else you could have refused me nothing, Felise. But now that I have set all the circumstances of my position before you, I ask you to think of me. You can bless me—reflect how your love can bless me. I am lonely, bitterly lonely, without you. I love no one else in the wide world; so I give you all my world for a plaything to throw away. Come to me—make me a new heaven and a new earth."

She sat up, but her face was so covered with tears that she was blind. The pure, girlish face, so true and tender, yet so suffering, stabbed him with remorse. His soul was an utter chaos: honor, truth, duty, all seemed to him fantastical restraints of weak, cold natures, for he was so smitten by this tragic passion of desire that there was but one Right for him in the world—to snatch to his own heart this precious flower of love. He was contemptuous of the risks he ran in gaining it: not to have this girl's love would precipitate him into the misery of a lifelong routine of every-day disappointments, with darker climaxes of deadly pain when remembering what he had almost gained, then lost. He tried to take her hand, but she repulsed him.

"You are torturing me," said he hoarsely.

She clasped her hands as children clasp them in prayer at their mother's knee, and shaking away her tears she looked into his face with the touching faith and dependence of a little child.

"I could not help loving you," she whispered, unable to command an audible voice, "but I can help ruining your life and—others' lives."

"You will ruin my life only by not giving yourself to me. Say once, 'I love you, Maurice—I will be your wife.'"

"No, Mr. Layton: I shall not say it."

"You confess you love me. Does the man you love deserve this treatment of you?"

"No," she answered timidly, fearful of arousing either his anger or his tenderness. "I have been very foolish, very wrong. You may blame me for all."

"Blame you, child! What do you

wish me to do?" He looked at her with an ironical smile.

"Act as if you had never seen me," she answered, shrinking from his gaze and speaking in a hopeless voice.

"Ah, how easy! You have the tutored mind of a woman, not the wild, fiery heart of a man. Act as if I had never seen you, Felise! Knowing you has cost me dear: ah, it has cost me all I once regarded with satisfaction—my self-respect, my love of my work, my conviction of what I must make my life. You have put into my experience imperishable desires which glow at fierce red heat, yet you bid me dismiss these raging wolves and go back unscarred to my old tranquillity of mind!"

He turned sharply on his heel and paced the room, moved by sudden wrath against her. She knew little of his struggle, or she must have felt a crueler pang, a deeper dismay. He was torn by strong passions, yet at the same time his mood verged on cynicism, and produced this discord of rage with his tenderness. This was, then, the way a woman loved—lure a man to the point of forgetting every landmark of duty and honor, then entrench herself safe within pious proprieties and bid him forget his longing for her!—draw away his heart and put a thorn in its place, but tell him to feel contented and happy! But when he turned and looked at her again his mood softened: his love made him at once too tender and too hard. "Don't condemn me to loneliness," he said recklessly, "or, worse still, to a careless marriage, unsanctified by one sacred hope. Forget conventional ideas for a moment: what you and I must do is to seize upon realities. Look me in the face." She obeyed him. "Don't you want to make me happy?" he asked with tenderness.

"Oh," cried poor Felise, stricken with bitter sorrow, "if it were only right I should so love to make you happy!"

He took her hands in his and crushed them to his heart. "Then love me," said he in an agonized voice—"love me, love me! Be my wife."

She drew them away from him slowly. "If you really love me," she murmured,

trembling from head to foot, "you will do what I ask you."

He nodded impatiently.

"Control yourself and me. You are a strong man, while I—oh, I am so miserably weak! It seems to me my heart will break. I cannot consent to what you ask. I appeal to your honor and generosity not to urge me any further."

The band, which had been for a while silent, now began to play again. Maurice had started abruptly at her words and turned away: then he came back and threw himself on his knees before her. Her words and manner had moved his better self. "I love you," he said fervently, "and you love me, and I can think of nothing else. I know but one wish—to have you for my wife. Everything besides seems too remote for me to care for it."

Their full glances met. It was a solemn moment. She was so very young: life without this love seemed so horribly desolate. It was hard to put away this happiness of which her longing heart had caught a glimpse. "We will do our duty," she said with a sob.

"Duty? Duty, Felise, tells me to see you no more."

She rose as pale as death. "It will not always be so hard," said she with angel tenderness toward the man whose misery showed so plainly in his face. "I have heard that time does everything: perhaps you will forget me."

"Perhaps so, child—when I am dead. I am not sure if even a wild love like mine goes into the grave. But, by Heaven! things between us are not ending in this way."

"Hush: sit down. Ah, do not let any one see—I think Mr. Clifford is looking for me."

And it was indeed Clifford who peeped in at the doorway with a fresh rose in his buttonhole. "Ah, Miss Clairmont," he cried, "they said you were up stairs, but my instinct led me safely to your feet. Do you hear that divine waltz of Strauss, and does it remind you of a promise?"

Felise rose. "I remember," she said in almost her ordinary manner, "that I was to dance the first Strauss waltz with

you." She turned to Maurice with a little timid questioning look.

He too had risen, and now stood beside her.

"Oh, don't mind Maurice," remarked Clifford, offering his arm. "I dare say he has been boring you abominably: let him go read his blue-books."

## CHAPTER XXII.

It was an hour later when Maurice entered the parlors. When Felise left him he had gone blindly out of doors and stood silently and fixedly among the shadows like a man in too much pain either of body or mind to know where he was. A pair of lovers penetrated his retreat at last, and he mechanically retraced his steps to the house. Rosamond met him in the hall and took his arm. "You are cold," she said to him with tender concern. "You have been out in the dew and damp, and are chilled through."

Yet the only sign of the struggle through which he had passed was a loss of color in his face, the swollen veins about his temples and two haggard lines around his firmly-cut lips. He answered Rosamond with a peculiar deference which pleased her, but which might have borne a painful significance if she had guessed the self-condemnation which inspired it, and they went arm in arm into the crowd of people that filled the parlors. Rosamond thrilled anew with the pride of being thus first with Maurice. She had never felt more happy and secure in his affections than to-night.

It was a gay party: in fact, no pains had been spared by either host or guests to have this final festivity of the summer a brilliant affair. Plenty of lights illumined the scene, and long mirrors gave back the fair festal picture of beautiful women in gala-dress. To Maurice there was as much reality in the scene as if he were looking at a flight of painted air-bubbles, half asleep the while. When he was addressed he replied in a courteous manner, and found no lack of words: once he was thrown by mere chance and against his will into prox-

imity with Felise, and when Rosamond spoke to her and drew him into the conversation, he even discovered that he could discuss ordinary subjects with her under Miss Clifford's auspices.

Mrs. Meredith stood at the head of the rooms, where she had received her nephew's guests, and was enjoying herself thoroughly, for something constantly occurred to impress her well-trained English eyes and ears with a sense of the drollness of Americans and their manners, until one middle-aged gentleman, hat in hand and with a deprecating glance of inquiry over the rim of his eye-glasses, remarked to her, "I have been in England. It is a fine country."

"Yes?" returned Mrs. Meredith.

"But the damp atmosphere and perpetual fogs are detestable."

"Ah!"

"I admire your government. The queen is a cipher, but you have excellent statesmen."

"Indeed!"

"Nothing but their adroit state-craft could have saved the aristocracy so long; but it is doomed. It is already rotten to the core, and tolerated merely because as a whole the nation is conservative if wisely governed, and prefers to wait patiently for reform rather than to precipitate a revolution. There is no longer any working principle among the nobility on account of their birth: they hold their own only by dint of good, steady, arduous work like common men."

"How well you understand us!" said Mrs. Meredith in a sarcastic voice.

He smiled: "Americans, madam, understand all nationalities, all governments, on the principle that the greater must include the less."

Mrs. Meredith fanned herself violently, but not thinking of the best thing to say, rebuffed the next comer instead, an aspiring young man who considered everything English strictly good form.

"Aw, Mrs. Meredith," said he, stretching his legs and looking at them admiringly—"Aw! you are very gay in the season—aw! quite bewildering festivities, and all that sort of thing."

"I do not go out a great deal."

"Aw! I was there last year, you know. Awfully jolly times everywhere! How fond you are of racing in England!"

Mrs. Meredith drew her small figure to its fullest height. "Sir," she returned freezingly, "you mistake: I am not fond of racing in England."

"Come, come, Aunt Agnes!" said Maurice, going up to her as the young man retired, "don't extinguish people in that way. Go and amuse yourself. You have done enough in receiving them: don't make them the victims of your wrath."

"Oh, I am civil enough. The people are mostly dreadful, but I will do my duty by them, as Frank asked me to."

Violet was quiet to-night. Leslie Wilmot had left Saintford for New York this very evening, for he was to sail the following morning at ten o'clock. Their parting had been assured enough: in six weeks' time Violet was to become his wife, and he had been eager to get home and conclude his arrangements, that he might be ready to receive her. Morton had been waiting for days impatiently for the departure of his rival, and to-night felt that the time had finally come to learn what feelings for him lurked beneath the imperious glances and chilling smiles which Violet had yielded him of late. He had hung about her for an hour before he finally went up and addressed her. She spoke very little in answer to his remarks, but twice an almost imperceptible smile played about her lips, then died away into a look which was almost repellent; but her large dark eyes were fixed upon him with interest.

"To-morrow morning I bid you good-bye," she said to him finally. "Years may pass before we meet again."

He started violently. "That must not be," he exclaimed vehemently, although under his breath. "I want to speak to you. Come out—the night is lovely—come out for half an hour: there is so much to be settled before you go away to-morrow."

She smiled again with a mysterious air, rose and walked beside him, not touching his arm, but following him through the parlors, across the hall, over the pi-

azza and down the steps to the terrace. She was richly dressed, but her silken skirts trailed carelessly across grass and gravel until they reached the summer-house. They had frequently been there before, and Morton felt that for her to consent to come with him to-night was the happiest augury for all his hopes.

The night was serene, but not over warm. Myriads of stars shone brilliantly, but there was no moon, and the dusk seemed almost oppressive here. In other parts of the ground hung Chinese lanterns: this spot was quite unbrightened, and seemed silent and deserted—the more so that occasionally a strain of music, louder than the rest, would come to their ears fraught with wild and melancholy inspiration, then sink away again into utter silence.

"The summer is over, Violet," said Morton. "Do you remember what you once promised me here when these weeks should have passed?"

"No," she answered in a clear voice, "I remember nothing. What did I promise?"

"When I told you the sole condition on which I dared remain in Saintford, you listened and yet bade me stay. Afterward—here, Violet—The memory of it belongs to my life-blood: surely you have not forgotten."

"Mr. Morton," she said in a sarcastic voice, "I have no memory for anything which took place before your proposal of marriage to Miss Clairmont."

"I have long since explained that piece of folly to you," he answered impatiently. "I was angry, maddened, desperate, at that time. Don't continue to blame me for what was, after all, the highest tribute I could pay to your power over me. I plunged into that love-affair as I might have plunged into the ocean, to drown the care which pursued me."

"I remember a pretty simile of Shakespeare's," retorted Violet, laughing, "about love as deep and boundless as the sea. But I am not so deluded as to accept a suicide of that particular degree as any especial tribute to my power over you. If she had accepted you, what then? A happy drowning, indeed!"

"She would never have accepted me," struck in Morton with anger. "Oh, Violet, it is cruel of you to question my love for you after these twelve years. Just for one moment let your mind revert to those old times at the Grange, when you used to steal out to me in the garden at night and give me your warm, sweet kisses. You loved me then: I loved you—not so well as I do now, but I loved you better than I did my life."

"I remember those evenings," said she in a cruel voice. "The emotion of those days seems far off and vague—like something, in fact, that took place before the Deluge: still, I remember it all. Many times since I have paused in the garden or the shrubberies and said to myself, 'This was the place where Harry told me so-and-so.' You remember the seat in the summer-house, and the railing where we leaned and you carved my name? Once after an absence of a year or two, when I went back and found the woodwork all freshened and restored, I felt absolutely pathetic over such desecration. I often sicken with weariness at the narrowness of my mental estate, yet give me, at least, the credit of making the most of the poor little shreds and patches of feeling, hope and romance gathered in my early youth."

"Your tone hurts me, Violet."

"I am a profoundly-experienced woman: don't expect me to talk like the school-girl I was once."

"Were you glad to meet me again this summer?" he demanded.

"Yes, I was glad. I had so often heard of you: I had often told myself that I should like to revive my recollections of my old friend, my tutor."

"Your lover—did you not call me your lover when you remembered me?"

"You have no idea of women's tenacity of remembrance when you ask that. Why not be candid? This is the last talk we shall have in all our lives. I have consoled myself at times for the disappointments, the humiliations, of my life by the thought that once I was young enough, good enough, true enough, to love and be wildly loved. At that time

I used to tell you every thought of my heart, and there was not one to blush at. And what a heart I had! The magic and beauty of the world had taken possession of me. I loved God; I wanted to be worthy of heaven; my heart sang psalms as I looked up to the stars when they shone pure and bright, just as they shine to-night. I used to tell you everything, and you too felt the charm of purity and faith and hope. Although we were so young, we were very serious. Perhaps youth always has holier dreams than maturity. When I think of the castles we used to build—"

He caught her hand. "They may all come true now," said he warmly. "Let us go back to the old hearts, the old wishes, the old loves. I am a trifle wiser: I do not think I am worse, or, if that early faith is a little clouded, in loving you, in living beside you, I could regain it all."

Violet raised her head. Her pale face, earnest and agitated, was clear before him now even in the dusky, mysterious gloom of the arbor. She left her hands in his and looked at him steadfastly. "How little you know me!" she exclaimed in a curious tone. "Do you remember," she went on in a low hurried voice, "the evening before we went to Saratoga?"

"I remember it well. I dined with you, and after you had gone into the parlor something occurred—just a few words from your cousin—to disgust me with myself. I have never blamed him: under the same circumstances I should have spoken as he did. The state of mind which I endured until I saw you again was the key to whatever was mysterious in my conduct."

She did not seem to listen to him. "That night," she went on the moment he paused, "all my wishes were to see you. Something seemed shattered within me: I longed to be assured of a love tender and true which I could at once accept and lean on to the end. In my thoughts that night, and indeed until I met you on my return, I had settled my whole future. After all—so I told myself—no one could love me like you.

Perhaps, too, I felt the meaning of that old couplet—

*Nous revenons, nous revenons toujours  
À nos premiers amours.*

I thought of you kindly enough at that time, Harry. I was ready to say good-bye to my past life—to give up my family. I even planned the existence two people could lead who loved each other, and found the world well lost for love. Indeed, my fancies for those few days had all the delirium of young, inexperienced, absurdly-hopeful hearts. I felt such a longing for rest—for something settled beyond any caprice of my own to change or unfix! But why too clearly expose my own weakness to the man who, even in the hours when I was thinking of him, was offering his love to another?"

She had continued to look him fixedly in the face, with her hands clasped in his, until her final words, when she rose, suddenly flinging his hands from her with a gesture of contemptuous scorn.

His heart for a few moments had been full of intense and almost unexpected happiness: his misgivings had vanished. At this sudden reverse he could not refrain from uttering a cry.

"I should expect that from you," she said—"a nerveless, inarticulate moan like a woman's. You do not deserve to be a man, weak, cowardly as you are. At the first word from Maurice you gave me up. Had you loved me, you would have dared him or any other to claim one iota of power to separate you from me. No, not a word," she went on vehemently, still standing apart from him. "I have listened to enough of your pleadings, your extenuations, your confessions, these past weeks. I had thought you in the past a man on whom I could rely—stronger, harder, more absolute in serene and steadfast will, than myself. I had been almost untrue to a heart that was at least single and unchangeable in its devotion to me. I was punished as I deserved. At another woman's first smile you left me. The moment you made that shameful confession you settled my fate in life for me."

He had recovered from his first hu-

miliation, and had advanced toward her, and now looked her steadily in the face. "Perhaps," said he slowly, "I am weak. I have wondered of late about my state of mind: perhaps it is that I am weak. Certain it is that you have made me what I am. Tell me, if you will, what is your fate in life to be?"

"I am to marry Leslie Wilmot before the end of October," she replied calmly.

"An excellent marriage!" remarked Morton. "After that announcement anything that I could say would be in bad taste. I will no longer cause you to stigmatize as weakness any cries from my heart. Let us go in. All my words, it seems, were too tardy: you might have been dancing all this time. Let us go in."

In truth, her keen words, supplemented by her announcement of her speedy marriage, had not so deeply wounded Morton, after all, but that he could reassert his pride and his self-control.

The looks they exchanged were strange.

"After all," Violet exclaimed involuntarily, "you have not loved me, then?"

Morton shuddered. "Yes," said he with some effort, "I have loved you. I have not yet thought of that. It only occurs to me that I have long subsisted on illusions. Twelve years is a long time to waste on one thought, and that the hope of winning a woman."

"Good-bye!" observed Violet after a moment's pause. "I dare say we shall meet again. Nothing is finished until we die, and most lives are mere kaleidoscopes where the same characters are endlessly reproduced under new combinations. Good-bye!"

Morton bowed in silence, and stood watching her as she walked down the garden-path toward the house, her tall slender figure sharply defined against the lights that illuminated terrace and lawn.

When she vanished he raised his hands above his head. "O Heaven!" he cried with a weary air, then swung his arms and rubbed his forehead as if half paralyzed by a heavy sleep from which he could not arouse himself. "Let me go back," said he to himself after a time:

"let me see if I have an interest in life." And he too left the summer-house and took the path which Violet had lately trodden.

He met Maurice on the terrace. "Oh, Morton," exclaimed the latter, "I wished to speak to you. You remember a certain conversation when I addressed you with more freedom than is my wont. I ask your pardon for assuming to dictate to you: it must have seemed that I pretended to regard both your motives and actions from a height you had not attained to."

"I never questioned your authority, Mr. Layton," Morton returned in a dull, stupefied manner. "I was, I presume, acting the part of a fool. I really do not remember."

"What I wished to gain was your forgiveness," said Maurice with a short laugh. "My words have often returned upon my mind of late. What right had I to judge others severely?"

"Oh, I forgive you willingly enough," rejoined Morton. "You too are leaving Saintford to-morrow?"

"Yes, I take Miss Clifford back to Newport. And what becomes of you? Shall you stay on here?"

"I don't know," answered Morton, and passed on, but in another moment some one else asked him the same question. It was Mrs. Dury, the mother of the little girl whom he had taken a strong fancy to of late. "Are you going to leave Saintford, Mr. Morton?" she asked him as he passed her.

"Not yet," he replied, and paused by her side. It was as well to talk to her as to another, he told himself; and Violet Meredith saw him come in and attach himself to the widow with a half-mocking smile on her face.

Frank Layton had not spoken to Felise since her first arrival before dinner. but he had looked at her frequently, and again and again she had caught his deep, attentive, inquiring look. His love was too tender to allow of his regrets being those only of the disappointment of a wild, impetuous, impotent longing. He told himself again and again that if she were happy he could bear his own trou-

bles; but she did not seem to him happy to-night. Even when she was dancing he observed her increasing pallor, the lustreless look of her eyes, the fixed, immobile expression of her lips; and when the evening was but half over he went up to her. "Are you not too tired to dance any more?" he asked her. "You have as yet paid me no attention. Come and sit down in a corner with me."

He met her eyes, and smiled reassuringly into her face. His heart throbbed with pity and with love for her.

"I am very tired," she confessed, and her eyes drooped, but not until he had caught sight of sudden tears.

Her mood was quite enigmatical to him. He looked about for Clifford, and saw him talking to his cousin Rosamond. "Would you like to have Clifford come?" Frank asked with the kindest voice: "I won't keep him away."

"Oh," cried Felise, "I do not care. I am so very tired. If you don't mind, Mr. Layton, will you take me somewhere and sit down and talk to me a little while?"

He led her into the library and sat down by her side, but he did not talk much. Now and then he alluded to the journey on which they were to set out on the morrow. To be sure, these three weeks of pleasant travel, looked forward to so long, seemed now to Frank a needless cruelty of fate—one of those ironic experiences which come to us all when the object of our ceaseless desire is granted under conditions which make it hateful. Yet, while he sat by her he was telling himself—no matter what words he was uttering—that, after all, he was learning something of Felise that Jack with all his good-fortune was not to know: he must comfort himself, then, with the wisdom which comes from pain and loss—the high belief in the goodness and sweetness of this little girl, which was to be his sole possession in her.

She looked up and saw his strong, clear gaze upon her. "Oh, you are so good to me!" she exclaimed with a half sob, and raised his hand and kissed it.

"I want to be good to you, dear child," said he, "and it is generous in you to pity

me. But there is Jack: I will resign my place to him. Poor fellow! he has got a long, lonely journey before him."

"A long, lonely journey!" cried Clifford, overhearing Frank's words as he started up suddenly from the side of Miss Clairmont. "Where to, my good fellow?"

"To the White Mountains, I suppose," rejoined Frank. "It seems a pity, since we are breaking up, that we must all go different ways. But I dare say you will overtake us at Lake George."

The partings came next morning. Maurice had not slept, but had watched the last stars fade out of the paling sky, and seen the rose-blushed horizon in the west answer the first streaks of gold in the east. His parting words to Felise were, "And shall I then see you no more?"

She looked up at him and answered calmly, "After a time."

"One would think," observed Miss Clifford, "that there was really something particular about this parting, when you know, Maurice, that I have invited Miss Clairmont to spend Christmas at Oaklands."

"But these breakings-up are painful," said Jack: "we shall never all come together again, and have the same happy times over. Some of us will be married, some will be suffering from the very sweetness of these same joyous days in Saintford: all of us will be older, and that means that instead of accepting the present we shall be embittering our hearts with recollections of the past."

Jack was a little sorrowful to-day, and his dejection caused him to yield more meekly than was his wont to the claims of general society upon him. He even suffered himself to be made useful by Mrs. Meredith, who encumbered him with all her light luggage, which consisted of a variety of wraps of every degree of thickness to suit the caprice of a mercury supposed capable of ranging between zero and summer-heat, a campstool, a cushion, half a dozen novels, all the magazines and an opera-glass. "In fact," Jack whispered to Felise, "I have all the miseries of a married man to endure, without any of the alleviations of the position."

Luigi and a maid were also in attendance, but they were heavily burdened with dressing-cases, leather bags and traveling-rugs. In truth, Frank Layton in setting out did not expect much from his journey except an opportunity to perfect himself in certain traits which are supposed to have been invented that torture here may be rewarded by bliss hereafter. He had had no conversation with his brother since their talk before dinner on the day previous. Maurice had not been quite strong enough to correct his brother's error. "After all," he said to himself at the sight of Frank's pale face, "he might bear a few more hours of discomfort now, since the promised land is before him."

The evening in New York passed heavily enough to the travelers: the ladies found excuses for seeking their rooms at an early hour, and Frank and Clifford were left to amuse themselves as best they might until bedtime.

"Let's go out," said Jack: "no one can sleep to-night, it is so infernally hot;" and they left the hotel, and walking along the upper side of Union Square, turned presently into Broadway. The thoroughfare was almost deserted, and a late moon was shining faintly in the east: now and then the voice of a street-singer broke the silence, but otherwise the great city was in outward repose.

Frank was smoking, and Jack, perhaps requiring consolation to-night, was also puffing away at a cigar. Neither of them spoke for a time.

"How dull we are!" remarked Jack.

"Silence is not dull necessarily: silence under the stars and with music in our ears is most brilliant. That air is Rossini's. I sometimes believe that no one else has put such lovely pure thoughts into sound. Who is your favorite composer, Jack?"

"I haven't an idea so long as he is an Italian. I have small fondness for German music."

"It is melody you like, then—not harmony. I love both German and Italian music, but I try to do battle for neither, for I will not be a partisan, and love one at the other's expense. It is difficult,

almost impossible, to make empirical rules for perception in art, but at times it seems to me that art is merely an outlet for our instincts. As a child nothing exalted and inspired me like church music: we had an organ at home, and I used to grope after certain chords which filled me with a sort of ecstatic terror to hear, and I looked about me fearfully, thinking that they must bring the angels down. Then as a youth, until I was long past your age, I was hungry for a certain overflowing of passionate individual feeling in music, such as Rossini, Bellini and Verdi seemed to me masters of; but now, if I desire to be soothed, I demand something wider in its sympathies, and love that sea of infinite harmonies where all humanity can enter, and of which Mozart and Beethoven are creators."

"I wish," said Jack with a comic gesture of despair—"I wish I could make some æsthetic or critical remarks in return. But the truth is, that although I regard the art as divine, I can think of nothing to say about it to-night, for my mind is on lesser things. I want to tell you something that may possibly interest you."

Frank cursed his mishap in being abroad with Clifford and a victim to his confidence: he had been talking for the sole purpose of taking up the time and preventing personal remarks. "It can't be," he groaned mentally, "that this ineffable coxcomb is to pour his raptures into my ears!" But aloud he said, blandly, "Excuse me for boring you, and let me hear your story at once; but allow me to say that I think I can predict it beforehand."

"Can you, indeed?" laughed Clifford. "Let us go in here and get some claret-and-soda." And entering a restaurant they took their places in a quiet corner. "So you really think you can predict what I am going to tell you? You fancy, Frank, that I have the honor to be engaged to Miss Clairmont?"

"I have no doubt of it," returned Frank, very gravely, but without winning.

"It is not the case," said Jack, drop-

ping his eyes. "I could not resist the pleasure of being envied by you for a few hours, but the truth is that she cares nothing for me, and that I am at present enduring a heartache without any chance of visiting a similar one on her."

Frank found it more difficult to bear his joy in silence than his pain, but he merely nodded and said nothing. "I know," pursued Jack, "that I have taken a weight off your soul. While you went on talking like a book, I had a great mind to let you proceed on your journey without setting you right in your calculations, just to see how long you would believe in my good luck; but, on my word, I felt sorry for the ladies under your charge, and knowing what it has been that has prevented you from making yourself in the least degree pleasant for the past twenty-four hours, I have sacrificed myself for everybody's good. Be assured of one thing, old fellow!—it is not my fault if I do not deserve your jealousy."

"I have not the slightest doubt of that. Were I not so confoundedly happy at discovering my stupid mistake, I have it in my heart to pity you for being so much less well off than I gave you credit for being. Not but what I wondered at her choice, though!"

"Confound your impudence!" exclaimed Jack. "On my word, I long to fight a duel with you. I wonder," he continued sentimentally, for he was still of the age when emotions were interesting phenomena to him—"I wonder how long these regrets will haunt me? I am afraid she is not one of those whom men forget easily, for there is something about her tones, about her little French tricks of manner, that keep me awake at night. She is like a jasmine flower in my memory." He met Frank's eyes, where there lurked a glimmer of amusement. "Look here!" pursued Jack in a different tone, "you must be quiet: subdue that triumph in your mien. I dare say that by a week from now you will be in my plight."

"Very likely," remarked that quiet gentleman, who did not care to discuss his chances.

"The women must look to their hearts for the next six months," went on Jack,

"for a thousand victories will but half atone for this defeat. After all, where is the use of marrying? Wherever I go I always have a good time, and here and there about the world are dear little hearts throbbing kindly for me under the laces. I have had a good many loves: I have enjoyed a playtime with them, and parted from them without regret. I love pretty, wicked, little glancing feet, soft white hands, wet, red lips with kisses on them. Flirting with a pretty woman is like a bee's sipping honey from a flower: I get the sweetness—what do I care for the flower? And if one cannot get the sweetness, a kiss refrained from is dearer to the heart than a kiss bestowed: nothing so perfect as unrealized bliss."

Frank took out his watch. "Quarter to twelve!" said he. "How much more claret-and-soda are you going to drink, Clifford? You will drown your pretty sentiments."

"Sentiments!" retorted Jack with disdain. "Much you know about my feelings!"

"Are you so hard hit, then?"

"I am not altogether the feather-headed fool you think me," said Clifford, and buried his face in his hands. It was a rather awkward position for Frank, who could not, as men are constituted, feel either sympathetic or consolatory just then, but he placed his hand on Jack's shoulder, and took it kindly when it was shaken off. The young fellow put his weakness behind him presently, and the two rose, paid their reckoning and passed out.

"I wish," observed Jack, his good spirits reasserting themselves, "that I could talk about Rossini, etc. Oh, shouldn't I love to bore you!"

After that the two were excellent company all the way back to the hotel.

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#### CHAPTER XXIII.

Now that Felise had left Saintford behind her, one resolution governed her heart and mind, and taught her not to venture to exaggerate the sweetness and

worth of those vanished summer days. She said to herself very often, "Mr. Layton has gone back to his old life, which is better for him than anything I could have given him in its place. I have done harm enough: let me undo it if I can." For his love—for that supreme emotion he had from her first meeting with him aroused in her heart, which might have imparted a sublime meaning to the faintest stirring of her soul's needs, exalting commonplace existence into rapture—she must have made him pay too heavy a price to allow their mutual happiness to become, even to themselves, an unmixed good. She was capable of some self-sacrifice, and had turned her back upon what seemed to her longing spirit heaven, to tread a dark, chilly road alone. Yet what matter, she thought, if she suffered, since he could go on nobly performing his life's work, faithful to the high demands he was on all sides pledged to fulfill? Not even the highest love is love's justification if gained at any expense of honor, truth, right and a lofty strength which results only from courage, obedience and self-control.

Felise loved Maurice too dearly not to reject any sullied bliss for him. She told herself now-a-days, too, that she was to marry Frank. She had not said it yet in words to him, nor answered his imperious questionings; but he had not forgotten the pressure of her timid lips upon his hand. He knew that she was half ill, that she needed a long interval of rest; and her wants were sacred to him because they were her wants. He did not ask why she was so weary, nor whence that brooding melancholy came that looked at him from her eyes.

But one night, when she was with him on Lake George watching the sunlight vanish from the hills and the shades creep over the dreaming forests, she suddenly granted an end to all his long torturing doubts, his enigmatical dilemmas. He had put his hand over hers as it lay on the edge of the boat. What he had said was nothing but what she had long known. He did not expect an answer then, yet while he looked at her, her hand beneath his stirred gently and

turned upward for him to clasp it. For a moment he did not even then believe in his own happiness, and gazed wonderingly into her suddenly downcast face. Each of them heard distinctly the late note of a bird break abruptly into song from the thickets on the bank: then their glances met with the tremulous joy of two children who have strayed far away, yet at last come upon each other in the wilderness. Frank understood all his rapture then, but who shall tell just how he began to understand it?

They drifted about in the rapidly-increasing dusk until the moon came up, and it was not until Felise shivered and begged him to find her shawl that he realized how late it had grown. What a pleasant thing it was to be engaged! he told himself as with a demure silence between them he rowed back to the shore. A wonderful experience, indeed! How full of indefinable pleasures!—momentary meetings of finger-tips; half glances; unfinished phrases more eloquent than rounded periods; timid efforts to make it seem easy and natural to endure an entirely new state of affairs; one's Christian name spoken softly with rising blushes; wondering, beautiful smiles at his ecstasy of gratitude; exquisite shyness after a long sweet caress, which reminded him of his boyhood when he had once tamed a fawn—so timid a creature that the wind in the trees, the flicker of light and shadow in the wood, frightened it, and when at times, with cunning devices, he would entice his pet to him and put his arm about it, he was conscious of a sort of cruelty, for its heart beat painfully—with the same startled throbs as this dear heart just now upon his breast—and its large, pathetic eyes were full of terror.

When Frank led Felise back to the house and into the presence of his aunt and cousin, although they greeted the young girl warmly as Frank's future wife, they betrayed little surprise—they had expected it so long, they affirmed: they had been so certain of this result that it was a little like the last chapter in a novel, which, although essential to the coherence of the story, is at best a trifle

tedious, since one has predicted it all along.

"Although, Frank," observed Violet, "sometimes you have looked miserable enough. You have had plenty of adversity to make the gods watch your struggles with some admiration."

"How have I looked when I was miserable—under the Clifford régime, for instance?" asked Frank.

"As if you had on a pair of tight boots," returned Violet.

"By the by, Felise," said Frank, crossing over and sitting down beside her, "I must telegraph to Jack."

"Telegraph to Mr. Clifford? What for?"

"Oh, I promised to let him hear our news: besides, I am impatient to be congratulated. In fact, I cannot realize but that the whole world has experienced a sort of joyful earthquake to-night, and that my friends will all understand it."

In fact, Frank was happy enough. Although he was not over-young, this new world of thought and sensation had renewed for him something better than the happiness of youth: fewer of his powers were latent than at twenty-five, and perfected happiness was on a basis of wider insight and fuller conditions. As for Felise, she felt very humble, very grateful to Frank, and very glad to be at rest, for she did feel perfectly at rest. She had dreaded at first to yield herself to this lover whom she knew to be, even though so infinitely tender, as strong and masterful in asserting his rights over her future as he was gentle in claiming them. It had been pain and terror to grant him that first caress, but that was over now: a woman's fate is fixed not by the love she gives, but by the love she accepts. When he had once taken her in his arms and kissed her, she realized absolutely that a great gulf divided her from her past—that she must not once look back. It was better so. She wished in her foolish girlish heart—and whispered to Frank too—that he were not so rich, not so capable of opening a dazzling vista of prosperity and brightness before her—that fate had granted her the inestimable boon of making some sacrifices in order

to deserve the priceless blessing of a love like his. Frank had found no fault with her romantic wishes, but was a trifle wiser than the tremulous, wet-eyed, flushed little girl who clung to him so timidly and humbly.

"Tell me, Felise," demanded Mrs. Meredith, "are you going to be a good wife to Frank?" She had been watching the young girl as her nephew leaned down toward her over the back of her chair.

Felise started at the question, and looked at her lover, who laughed slightly, with the air of a man who had long since mastered the subject. "I will try," returned Felise gravely.

"Frank deserves a good wife," remarked Mrs. Meredith, with a scrutinizing glance at the young rose-flushed face.

"I think," answered Felise, putting her hands to her face, "that nobody in all the wide, wide world knows how good he is as well as I do. I will study how to deserve him."

Frank patted her bent head, and observed gayly that he wanted her to grow no better, since in that case he must sit up o' nights studying how to qualify himself for her; and then he asked for his letters, which ought to have come in while he was on the lake. "None from Maurice?" said he, looking over the mail which Luigi brought him. "What ails the fellow? He has not written since we broke up at Saintford. But here is an envelope in Morton's handwriting: aren't you a little curious to hear what he is doing without you, Violet?"

"Making love to Mrs. Dury," predicted Violet; and Frank, reading his letter, shouted with laughter at the accuracy of her prophecy. The letter covered but a half page, which, after perusal, he passed to Felise. "Great news!" said he: "Morton is engaged, and I think, so far as unexpectedness is concerned, his announcement dwarfs mine into insignificance."

"You surely do not mean—"

"That Harry Morton is engaged to Mrs. Dury? I do." Frank laughed again, then grew serious: "Poor fellow! But I am glad he has done it. She hon-

estly liked him from the outset, and her little girl is an angel. And I fancy he needed an angel of consolation, Violet."

"He seems," returned Miss Meredith, with a dulled voice and a haughty look, "to have rested his claims of salvation on loving much and—many."

"His hopes were extravagant," returned Frank, "and we may pity him for an equal extravagance of disappointment. He is caught at the rebound, and in every rebound there is a large proportion of the original impulse.—I wonder, Felise, if he will stay in Saintford, so that we may have his happiness before our eyes?"

"It is all very droll," remarked Mrs. Meredith. "But one thing is certain: he will take life in a different way now from what he used to do. He will find it a pleasant sort of place to eat, sleep and lounge in. He will write no more poetry, and I doubt too if he will publish any more novels."

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE evening late in September, Miss Clifford entered the drawing-room dressed for dinner, and found her engaged husband, Maurice Layton, whom she had supposed to be in the study with her father, pacing restlessly to and fro with a haggard face. He put a chair for her before the open fire, then resumed his walk, staring abstractedly from each window as he neared it, as if he expected to catch a glimpse of something lost in the thickening twilight, or was weary of the slow-dropping rain which blurred what still remained of the darkened landscape.

"What is the matter?" demanded Rosamond. "Maurice, you make me nervous. Pray come and sit down."

He approached and took a seat beside her, gazing moodily into the leaping flames of the wood-fire.

"There!" exclaimed Rosamond, "the same old way! You behave horribly of late. What can be the matter with you?"

"My dear Rosamond, I am a rough-

hewn man. I have the manners of a bear."

"Nonsense, Maurice! I am only anxious about your health."

"Dear friend, my health is perfect: I was never better in all my life."

"But you seem so gloomy, so preoccupied!"

Maurice sprang up with a gesture of impatience. "When we are married," said he with a short laugh, laying both hands on Miss Clifford's shoulders—"when we are married I shall allow you absolute freedom, and reserve but one privilege for myself; and that is that I may grin like a clown, sigh like Hamlet or frown like Jove without your making any comments upon my personal eccentricities. I am sorry I do not please you."

Rosamond leaned her cheek upon his hand with a mute caress, which was with her an unwonted demonstration of fondness. "But, dear Maurice," she returned softly, "you don't seem happy. I want you to feel satisfied with your life. What fails you? It appears to me that you have everything a man's heart can desire. Tell me what you were thinking about when I came into the room." And she looked up into his face with a smiling but keen glance.

He answered her smile, yet his heart was bitter. As he paced those long rooms his mind had been alive with memories, and, despite all his trained self-control, stirred with feverish regrets, unequaled both in sweetness and in pain, for that last cup of promise in which had sparkled for him all the rapture of youth. He had remembered the summer days in Saintford, and then, his present staring him in the face in dull contrast, he had realized afresh how irremediable was his loss—how in resigning Felise he had given up all his youth. Sometimes since they had parted, only four weeks before, he had remembered her without this imperious but impotent passion of regret. To-night her voice seemed to have addressed him once more from across the river which separated them so widely, and those last faint tones of renunciation had smote afresh all the chords of his heart, making his

sorrow almost too painful and crushing to be borne.

"I was thinking," he said calmly, answering Rosamond's question, "of many things. I have had a letter from Frank: he is again in Saintford. I can tell you plenty of news. Aunt Agnes and Violet sailed last Saturday for Liverpool: the wedding is fixed for the twentieth of October."

"But I knew all that before."

"One never knows anything for certain where Violet Meredith is concerned, but in this case it does seem probable that affairs will develop favorably, and that in three weeks' time she will become Mrs. Leslie Wilmot. There is another piece of gossip, which, read between the lines, makes it belong properly to the announcement concerning my cousin, rather than a spontaneous and self-existing fact by itself."

"And what is that?"

"Morton is to marry Mrs. Dury."

"How very odd!"

"Odd? Not at all. If you draw a pendulum as far as you can to the right, when it swings back it will go the same distance to the left. Violet had so completely upset the poor fellow, I should have been surprised only at hearing that he had without a struggle subsided into an ignoble existence. Still, looked at with certain of the summer reminiscences fresh in my mind, his engagement is, as Aunt Agnes would say, 'very droll.'"

"But then an engagement is always rather ridiculous," observed Rosamond comfortably. "I really cannot see that it is any more ridiculous for Mr. Morton to be engaged to the widow than for—"

"You to be engaged to me, for instance," struck in Maurice. "You know very well I regard our position as very ridiculous, and advise you to end it as soon as possible. But I have not yet exhausted my budget." He looked into her face and smiled. "Frank is engaged to Miss Clairmont," said he in a low voice. "Is not that good news?"

Rosamond flushed ever so slightly. "When did it happen?" she asked with some visible constraint in her manner.

"Two weeks ago," Maurice returned with a tranquil smile and an easy air. "They kept their news until Felise was at home again."

Rosamond's face had cleared, and she put her hand in Maurice's. "I am glad to hear it," she said kindly. "You have been anxious that Frank should be happy: I congratulate you sincerely."

He was silent a moment, and when he spoke again had mastered a certain weakness. Disappointments had not, after all, unnerved his spirit: perhaps in measuring himself against the demands of life he had gained something in the place of that which he had lost. With noble minds loss means retrieval.

"Frank writes me unrestrainedly," he observed at length. "If a man were ever more happy than he is at present, he nev-

er came within my experience. His is no useless love, which must burn itself out or seek fresh excitements with an ever-hungry heart: his life is not broken up into meaningless fragments; his powers have been latent, but have been developing nevertheless. I fancy this fortunate marriage will find them their long-awaited opportunity."

Rosamond had not followed Maurice's rambling speech: her mind had suddenly become calm. Let us not conceal the truth. Without any positive knowledge, the thought of Felise had caused her some suffering, but as Frank's wife the young girl was quite disarmed.

Maurice sighed a little now and then through the evening, but did not let disquietude again lay hold of him.





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